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GENDER, BODY, AND WILDERNESS: SEARCHING FOR REFUGE, CONNECTION, AND ECOLOGICAL BELONGING

By

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Thesis

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Gender, Body, and Wilderness: searching for refuge, connection, and ecological belonging

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The purpose of this study was to explore, describe, and explain how people (gbtlq identified persons in particular) experience gender and body in wilderness settings. The motivations for this research include: the current context of gender and gender oppression in American society; the potential of wilderness experiences to offer different ways of being and escape from social constrictions; and gaps in the literature on gender and wilderness. A qualitative/interpretive approach was employed for this research which encompasses aspects of phenomenology, feminist methodology, and grounded theory. The results and analysis for this study yielded an analytical story about ecological belonging which includes locating the self, awakening of the body, feelings of connectedness, wilderness as refuge from normative gender, vulnerability, and the wilderness setting. In this story, we find that participants can experience wilderness as a refuge from normative gender because wilderness is unpatrollable and because wild places can offer refuge from un-accepting people and judgment; and because wilderness is a sort of ‘holding environment’ for freedom of expression and safety in change and transition. This study also shows how participants are able to experience a profound sense of connection and ecological belonging because they experience themselves as human animals; an experience which awakens one’s sense of vulnerability. Connecting with our bodies, with our ‘animal-selves’, and feeling vulnerable as a human animal changes the potential for ecological belonging; it allows us feel our mortality and acknowledge that we are not at the top of the food chain. This research concludes by offering substantive and theoretical conclusions including recommendations for wilderness educators and managers; future research directions for gender and wilderness; and how wilderness experiences can inform ethical models for living in contemporary society. For instance, while the lessons wilderness offers may be infinite—from this study we can at least discern that part of repairing the human relationship with nature means repairing our relationship with all oppressed *Others* whereby domination is justified through faulty presumptions of moral superiority. Imperative to this is experiencing ourselves as animals in an ecological system and recognizing the damage caused by the social structures that placate our wildness.

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CHAPTER 1—INTRODUCTION

“If anything is endangered in America it is our experience of wild nature—gross contact. There is knowledge only the wild can give us, knowledge specific to the experience of it. These are its gifts to us. In this, wilderness is no different from music, painting, poetry, or love” ~ Jack Turner, 1996: 26

“Ultimately, to acknowledge the life of the body, and to affirm our solidarity with this physical form, is to acknowledge our existence as one of the earth’s animals, and so to remember and rejuvenate the organic basis of our thoughts and our intelligence” ~ Abram, 2006: 47

Wilderness offers opportunities, potentials, and hidden or unspoken aspects of being. In wilderness we gain a “sensual knowledge, an emotional one-[a]carnal knowledge-a feral way of knowing” (Griffiths 2006: 83) that pushes back against a western culture tamed, trained, and constrained by consumerism and various social prescriptions. Wilderness experiences remind us what it means ‘to be’ ecologically because through these experiences we can (re)connect with our material bodies, to our own wildness, and to what it means to be a human animal and live in relation to and be surrounded by ‘other’ breathing and pulsating animal bodies. Wilderness also offers the opportunity for escape and refuge from a predatorial society and from surveillance, technology, and social expectations. Wilderness experiences, in many ways and through both pleasure and pain, can make us feel authentic, unmediated, unpolluted, alive, and (re)connected with ourselves and to the natural world. In wild lands,

“That is when we experience our most feral nature—often in a carnal rage against restrictions, a compulsion to be what we are at that time: a creature of the darkest forest within, the undomesticated, unhousebound, unhusbanded woman, hungry for something beyond human society, restless, prowling, in thrall to a savage earth lust” (Griffiths, 2006: 54).

Problem Statement

I am interested in understanding subjective dimensions of these wilderness experiences which are also embedded in dynamic cultural contexts. In particular, how people experience wild places and how people experience their bodies can have a great deal to do with gender and

sexual orientation. Thus, the purpose of this project is to explore, describe, and explain how people experience gender and body in wilderness settings.

In wilderness, people often find different ways of being away from social customs; these ways of being are quite distinct from those experienced in everyday life. Wild places are in fact often sought out for escape from social constraints; again, to understand what exactly people wish to escape can often depend on gender and sexual orientation, and thus how they experience gender oppression. At the root of oppression are moral evaluations that justify power, control, and dominance over *Others*. In such a system, women and queers often face discrimination, ridicule, violence, moral damage, and estrangement. Like many people oppressed in a hetero-patriarchal society, wild nature has also been subject to oppressive forces that illustrate the same underlying measures of control and dominance. Resource extraction, nuclear wastes, suburban development, oil spills, species extinction, oceanic dead zones, over-harvesting of marine life, and mountain-top removal are several pertinent examples of an industrial human society's current relationship with nature. It is also the case that many people wish to heal such a history of oppression—both between humans and humans and between humans, wild nature, and other animals. One way of healing is through wild land preservation and environmental legislation. Another—and perhaps more personal way is to heal at the level of the body—through lived wilderness experiences. In this way—we may come to know what wild nature can tell us about how, where, and why we belong.

The motivations for this research stem from a desire to understand the connections between gender, body, wilderness, and oppression. Interestingly, what started as an exploration of gender and the body became an analytical story about connection, refuge, and belonging.

Contained within this story are valuable gaps in our knowledge about gender and wilderness which include:

- ❖ How transgendered, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and/or queer peoples describe their wilderness experiences;
- ❖ an examination of the intersections between the body and gender in wild places;
- ❖ and an in-depth description and examination of how and why participants experience ecological and social belonging in wild places.

For example, this study considers whether looking at the body in wilderness settings can have something to say about human alienation from nature and gender difference in American culture? Is there something unique about how people with non-heteronormative genders and sexualities experience gender; and what might these stories reveal about the broader implications of gender difference and the distinctiveness of wilderness settings? What follows is an attempt to outline why these questions are important; this chapter is thus an introduction to the motivations and context(s) for this research project. Those motivations stem from the current context of gender oppression in America; personal experiences with gender oppression and negotiation; the potential for wilderness experiences to offer different ways of being as well as an escape from social constrictions; and gaps in the literature on gender in wilderness.

Gender oppression in America

I locate the work within gender oppression partly to signal *why* I am studying what I am studying. First, and as I will describe later, I cannot deny that much of how I understand the world is through this lens and much of what I wish to change about this world has to do with gender oppression. I also believe, however, that part of studying the folks in this sample was about understanding gender and gender oppression. And third, locating the work within gender

oppression helps to understand the significance of results found in this study such as *wilderness as a refuge from normative gender; connecting to our animal-selves; and feelings of ecological belonging*. As Sophia-Margeaux explains, for example,

“I’m either this guy ‘***’ or ‘****’ dressed as a woman’ or something, and the one unknown and scary, creepy, freaky and weird. So is it any wonder I choose to recreate alone in the wild places for at least then I can engage my own gender congruence (or delusion) without the threat of a disbelieving or disapproving public” (Sophia-Margeaux, 2010: letter #1).

As many contemporary feminist philosophers have pointed out—understanding oppression is also useful for critiquing dualistic thinking and domination and for considering the connections between those labeled as *Other*—such as women (not men), queers (not heterosexual), bodies (not mind), and nature (not culture). Oppression is thus at least one way (but not the only way) of looking at the connections and tensions between and among these dualisms, particularly at the relationships between gender (and gender dissidents), body, and wilderness. What follows is a brief introduction to oppression in general and gender oppression in particular.

Historically women and queers have been labeled—among many things—as dysfunctional and deviant as well as morally and intellectually inferior; we have been marginalized socially, economically, religiously, physically, and professionally. Although great strides have been made in confronting gender oppression—American society still silences the voices of and withholds full citizenship to gender minorities (or gender dissidents). American society also categorizes individuals as *either/or* in terms of sex, gender, and sexuality. We are, for example, male or female; masculine or feminine; and gay, straight, or confused. Society uses these binary categories to morally devalue ‘others’ (women, queers, nature) and thus to justify domination and oppression (Warren, 1990). Oppression can be defined as “a system of institutional forces and processes that keep the members of some social groups from full

participation in their society” (Lindemann, 2006: 31). “The experience of oppressed people,” for example,

“is that the living of one’s life is confined and shaped by forces and barriers which are not accidental or occasional and hence avoidable, but are systematically related to each other in such a way as to catch one between and among them and restrict or penalize motion in any direction. It is the experience of being caged in: all avenues, in every direction, are blocked or booby trapped” (Frye, 1983: 4).

Indeed, oppression is not just about suffering and limitations—it is about power and control.

Dominant groups use power to immobilize and police members of oppressed groups. Hilde Lindeman (2006), for instance, outlines four forces of oppression: *pressive*, *expulsive*, *dismissive*, and *preservative* (34-36). The *pressive* force occurs when social groups are pressured into serving the dominant group; this service involves trust and is rationalized through morally sanctioned norms such as the role of a wife in many traditional marriages. In the *expulsive force*—the dominant group expels social groups from society. Nazi Germany’s expulsion and extermination of Jews, gays, and lesbians (gypsies and ‘others’) is an example of the *expulsive force*. The *dismissive force* of oppression tolerates the oppressed group but pushes them into the margins where they are distanced from the dominant group and where they do not have access to goods and opportunities. Two examples include pushing Native Americans onto reservations and pushing queers into closets (Lindemann, 2006: 36). Here, the dominant group patrols the oppressed group to make sure they stay marginalized. Finally, the *preservative force* defines those unlike the dominant group as ‘Other’ and abnormal in order to preserve the dominant group’s sense of what is right and normal and to morally justify their position of power. “Preservative forces,” for example, “ensure not only that gender continues to be the identification with one sex, but also that it continues to require that sexual desire is directed toward the other sex” (Lindeman, 2006: 36).

Personal motivations and gender oppression

“Motivation for me was a matter of how a particular issue was connected to who I am and who I want to be—a matter of why I should be working on this topic. Motivation for my colleague was just about theories; for me, it was about my relationships to theories” ~ Joyce Treblicot, 1991

Personal and professional experiences are powerful motivators for research endeavors (Corbin and Strauss, 2008: 23). My personal experiences growing up female in southeastern America undoubtedly informed the direction of this study; my experiences also demonstrate some of the oppressive forces as they relate to gender, sex, and sexuality. I remember, for instance, the first time I was told to put on a shirt. I was seven years old running around the hollers of Eastern Kentucky playing in the creek looking for ‘crawl-dads’, catching turtles, climbing trees, digging up dead things in the sand, looking for grapevines to swing on, asking my uncle to make me spears out of sticks I’d found. I was free and happy. I remember one day as I was running across the carport off to some new adventure when some woman in my family stopped me and said it was time I wear a shirt. I thought why did it matter and why didn’t this same rule apply to my boy cousin down the road? I understand now for I have confronted this rule many times since then. Sexualization and objectification of the female body starts early—even before the development of secondary sex characteristics such as breasts.

As an adult, I visit these same hollers and I meet the same rigidity. Even the youth there have become disciplinarians on the proper ways to be feminine. Take for example my then six-year old cousin—Priscilla—as she walks confidently toward my body; her eyes are combing over me and her lips are taut with disdain. Like many women in my family, she is doing what she has been socialized to do—critique the surface and appearance of the female body in regards to weight, hair, clothing, and smell. She says to me, “You stink, you should wear deodorant”; “Your legs are hairy—that’s disgusting”; and “Why are you wearing boots? Girls don’t wear

boots.” I thought—how does she know this already? My heart broke a little each time, thinking I had failed to do my job as a female role model. I couldn’t compete with what the rest of her world told her was appropriately ‘female’. That same cousin—at age 12—still tells me to shave my armpits but now she tells me I must do so to ‘find a man’ because ‘the bible says men should be with women.’

As an adult, I’ve also seen grown women turn red with panic when my ‘boyish’ looking girlfriends enter the women’s restroom. In grocery stores—I’ve been asked by confused and disapproving strangers: “Are you a boy or a girl? Which is it?” At the gym, playing basketball—I’ve been asked to put my shirt on over my sports bra while other men play shirtless. I’ve been asked to do housework after I was hired to do yard work. I’ve been told I can’t get on the lookout roof to shingle because I don’t have any experience on roofs. Then I watched men—who have no experience—shingle a roof. In my front yard—I’ve held and soothed my mother’s hysteria when I told her I was gay and I’ve listened to my father tell me he’d rather his child be dead than be gay. Although we’ve (family) come a long way since then—those memories still hold strong to my experience in this world. These experiences tell a story not just about me but about the oppression of many girls, women, queers, and transgendered folk. I share these personal stories because they represent several of the powerful motivations for this project; they also demonstrate that—if there should be any doubts—gender oppression is a lived reality for many people in American society.

Potential of wilderness and gender research

My experiences growing up female and queer clearly sparked an early interest in gender and oppression. Most important, they illustrate that feminist theories about gender and

oppression begin with lived experiences. Wilderness also has much to do with lived experiences. From both we gain knowledge particular only to *being in situation*. For this research project, I chose to explore gender *in wilderness* because I thought wild places offered space to reconnect with our bodies and escape the social constructs of gender. Indeed, wilderness recreation offers the opportunity to escape structures of oppression and allows freedom of expression and freedom from patrol, judgment, and un-accepting people.

Past research on gender and wild places has shown how wilderness can be a place for liberation; this research on gender and wilderness focuses mostly on women and empowerment (Angell 1994; Bialeschki & Henderson 1993; Kohn 1991; Mitten 1994; Powch 1994; Pohl, Borrie, and Patterson, 2000; Hart & Silka 1994; Stopha 1994; Yerkes and Miranda 1982). Pohl, Borrie, and Patterson (2000) assert, for example, that wilderness offers space where women can “go directly against the grain of what they have essentially been socialized to be” (416) and “Wilderness recreation (because it offers opportunities for self-sufficiency, change in perspective, connection with others, and mental clarity), contributes to assertiveness, challenging norms, and gaining a new world view” (432). Indeed, wilderness experiences do have the potential to help girls and women resist the oppressive and normative gender roles, body perceptions, and gender prescriptions that societies and families dictate and demand of ‘females’ in the predominately heterosexual-Christian-technologically savvy United States of America.

Truly, past studies on wilderness and gender are invaluable for understanding gender oppression in Western culture and liberation in wild places. But little has been done to 1) problematize gender and acknowledge transitory gender categories, 2) look specifically beyond the male/female heterosexual master narrative, or 3) examine the intersections between the body and gender in wild places (exceptions: McDermott 2000a, 2004; Newberry 2003). Thus, the

impetus for this project is two-fold: to explore gender and embodiment in wilderness and to understand alternative narratives about wilderness experiences. These imperatives speak to significant gaps in our understanding of wilderness experiences in the *technical literature*. A nuanced account of gender in wilderness settings could help promote gender-awareness and shed light on how and why socially oppressed groups experience wild places. Wilderness experiences do not necessarily dictate these particular outcomes but there is hope in knowing these opportunities and potentials ‘to be’ are out there and that they can help us learn and experiment with who we are in nature.

Major Goals/Guiding Questions

Given these gaps in the literature, the current context of gender oppression in America, and the opportunities wilderness provides for profound bodily experiences and escape from social constrictions (for women and queers in particular)—the research aims to explore a nuanced account of gender and the body in wilderness and to understand wilderness experiences for people who lead non-heteronormative lives. In understanding non-heteronormative experiences of wilderness/gender, I focus on those people who identify as GBTLQ (Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered/Transexual, Lesbian, or Queer). Thus—empirically—the primary goal was to present alternative narratives to the ‘master-narratives’ of the wilderness recreationist in the United States. “Master narratives”, Lindemann (2006) explains, “provide the character types and plot templates that let you locate yourself (or other people) within your society” (49). For example, the master narrative for a person in the United States might be white, male, heterosexual, Christian, and middle class. Furthermore, the master narrative for a female in

America might be concerned with reproduction, marriage, weight, body maintenance, mothering, wealth, and prestige.

My initial thoughts while searching for these alternative narratives was that I would find an explicit element of resistance in how people described their wilderness experiences. This thought came from a firm belief that resistance (in opposition to heteronormativity) was integral to queer identity and that in wilderness one could resist social expectations of gender and sexuality. The search for resistance was also supported by the work of influential scholars such as Thomas Birch (1990) and other feminists who maintained that through participation in wilderness we could resist the demands of hegemonic forces. Ultimately—and as will be elaborated on throughout the thesis—although resistance was significant to queer identity, the connections between wilderness and resistance were opaque, perhaps a result of language limitations (most connotations of resistance signal opposition, confrontation, or fighting) or perhaps because most wilderness narratives in this research were about refuge, connection, and belonging.

Methodologically and philosophically—I initially chose to explore a feminist-phenomenological approach because I was interested in understanding subjective accounts of the lived body—which is a “unified idea of a physical body acting and experiencing in a specific-cultural contexts; it is body in situation” (Young, 2002: 415). I wanted to explore the human body, for example, as David Abram describes: “Underneath the anatomized and mechanical body that we have learned to conceive, prior indeed to all our conceptions, dwells the body as it actually experiences things, this poised and animate power that initiates all our projects and suffers all our passions” (Abram, 1996: 46). Additionally, I wanted to investigate the influence of gender on this experiencing body and I thought wilderness settings—because they offer

escape from social constrictions—also offer unique opportunities to look at bodily experiences without the constraints of gender. In the end, phenomenology was more helpful as a philosophical orientation and a starting point rather than a methodological approach; I found, for instance, the approach difficult for beginning researchers (such as myself) who may need a bit more of a road map detailing explicit methodological tools for data collection and analysis. For me, I found that road map in the 3rd edition of *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (Corbin and Strauss, 2008).

Substantively—it is my hope that this project’s exploration of gender and the body in wilderness will inform wilderness and feminist philosophers, outdoor educators, and wilderness managers of the diversity of individuals who recreate and work in wilderness and surrounding wild lands as well the role wilderness plays in our search for connection, refuge, and ecological belonging.

With these aims in mind—several guiding research questions were used throughout the study. The order of the questions signals that understanding gender, body, and the perspective of the participant were prioritized. Questions on resistance were always part of the project—but less so than gender and the body, and as the study progressed questions on resistance became less prioritized. Guiding research questions for this project include:

1. How do GBTLQ persons describe their wilderness experiences?
2. How do people experience their gender and body in wilderness?
3. What is the role of the body in understanding gender in wilderness?
4. How do wilderness experiences allow (or do not allow) people to transcend the social categories of gender? How are these social categories indicative of oppressive forces in American society? What do wilderness experiences tell us about gender oppression in American society?
5. How and why does wilderness teach us to live through, live in, and reconnect with our bodies?
6. What role does resistance play for why GBTLQ persons recreate in wilderness? How do GBTLQ persons use physical (bodily) agency as a form of resistance? Does this ‘embodied resistance’ manifest in wilderness experiences?

Thesis Organization

This thesis is organized into five parts. This introductory chapter describes the questions and motivations for undertaking this research project. Those motivations include the current context of gender oppression in America; personal experiences with gender oppression and negotiation; the potential for wilderness experiences to offer an escape from social constrictions; and gaps in the literature on wilderness and gender. The second chapter is a review of the literature that informed this project; the focus of that chapter brings together relevant research and theory on gender and wilderness. The second chapter reviews the evolution of wilderness as a concept and a space and includes postmodern/ecofeminist critiques of wilderness as *Other*. Post-structural feminist theories of gender are also outlined and followed by an examination of the research on gender in the fields of leisure studies and outdoor/experiential education. The chapter closes with conclusions and implications for future research based on gaps and suggestions found in the literature. Chapter three details my methodological approach to addressing the guiding research questions listed in the introductory chapter. This Methodology chapter, for instance, describes the interview and analytic process as well as my feminist commitments in social research. Chapter four is an in-depth examination of the stories and data that surfaced during interviews and subsequent correspondence with interviewees. This Results and Analysis chapter outlines and describes the analytic storyline as well as the concluding hypotheses derived from interview data analysis. Chapter five concludes the thesis with a discussion of these hypotheses and the implications of the overarching story as described in the results. The discussion chapter engages the results of this study with previous literature on wilderness and gender and also includes recommendations for wilderness managers and educators and recommendations for future research on gender and wilderness.

CHAPTER 2—LITERATURE REVIEW

This research project pulls from previous ideas, theories, and empirical research from a variety of different areas. The overarching theme or goal in this literature review is to bring together two main areas of research: 1) literature, empirical research, and theories about *wilderness* and *wilderness experiences* and 2) literature, empirical research, and theories about *gender*. Both of these research streams are far-reaching and diverse in that they both include multiple disciplines and research approaches. As such, it is beyond the scope of this project to cover every detail of wilderness and gender as they have evolved over time in theoretical and empirical research. What I provide here is a brief background in each of the research areas and then focus on work that brings wilderness and gender together. Much of the review on these two areas is informed by feminist philosophy and methodology. Wilderness and gender, for example, have been studied together from a variety of different perspectives including nature-writing/anthropology (Griffiths, 2006); eco-feminism and critical theory (Greta Gaard, 1997a; Val Plumwood, 1993, 1998; Birch, 1990); leisure theory (Henderson and Bialeschki, 1986); sociology of the body and physicalities of women (McDermott 1996; McDermott 2000a, 2000b; McDermott 2004); and outdoor and experiential education (Warren, 1999, 1996a, 1996b, 2002; T.A. Loeffler 1995, Wittmer, 2001; Pinch, 2003).

This literature provided invaluable conceptual foundations for the how and why of this project; these foundations, for example, informed the focus and overarching research questions and guided data collection, analysis, and methodological decision-making. At times the literature reviewed extends beyond the study but is offered as a comprehensive understanding of relevant material. To help the reader, I have therefore included several orienting sentences in most sections to show how the literature is particularly informative for this research and/or how

the results of this study fit within previous research. In the first section, *Wilderness: concept, space, and place*, I discuss 1) the early influences that led to the current conceptions and legal designation of wilderness; 2) relevant eco-feminist and postmodern critiques and re-conceptualizations of wilderness as Other; 3) the potential of looking at geographical concepts such as space in wilderness contexts; and 4) the role of providing *Other* perspectives of wilderness experiences through empirical research. In these discussions, I also highlight why it's necessary to look at gender and resistance in wilderness contexts as well as why wild places offer an exceptional place to investigate the gender, the body, and resistance. In the next section, *Feminist Philosophies of Gender*, I discuss the potential of using post-structural feminist theory to understand gender within these contexts. This section outlines key ideas such as gender oppression, gender as performance, and the cultural discourses and disciplines around gender in Western society. In the last section, *Gender Research*, I look at empirical research on gender and wilderness in the fields of leisure studies and outdoor/experiential education. A brief history of gender research in each of these fields will also be given before looking at gender in wilderness contexts. Here I also point out the current gaps in the literature on gender in these fields and the implications for investigating gender in wilderness from a post-structural feminist framework. I will address how the results of this study speak back to the literature reviewed here in the discussion chapter of the thesis.

WILDERNESS: CONCEPT, SPACE, AND PLACE

“The experience of the Other as a void or an absence is a prelude to invasion and instrumentalization, whereas the experiences of the Other as a presence is the prelude to dialogue” ~ Plumwood, 1998: 681

“Wilderness is a place where the wild potential is fully expressed, a diversity of living and non-living beings flourishing according to their own sorts of order” ~ Gary Snyder, 1990: 12

“A wilderness is a self-willed land” ~ Jay Griffiths, 2006: 41

Early influences and legal designation

Western conceptions of wilderness as a place before the 17th century were heavily influenced by Christianity (Edwards, 1758) and colonization. Some wilderness scholars have shown how these early influences coupled with American frontier hardships shaped the early idea of wilderness as a frightening and uninviting wasteland (Nash, 2001). Others, however, have revealed the appreciation and reverence for wilderness by the early Christian monks who retreated there for seclusion and purification (Bratton, 1988). As many of these early monks fled to wilderness to practice extreme asceticism—wilderness experiences also became a place and a way to deny superficial bodily urges and wants. Colonial conceptions of wilderness, however, in American (and Australian) contexts saw wilderness (or vast tracks of land) as ‘empty’ and ‘virginal’; these conceptions effectively erased the *presence* and *agency* of both indigenous peoples and nature (Plumwood, 1998). The colonial idea of ‘emptiness’ has been critiqued as Eurocentric and androcentric; an idea which only gives definition to ‘Others’ in relation to European humans. Then, in the 18th and early 19th centuries, the early Christian conceptions of wilderness based on fear and abhorrence and colonial conceptions based on destruction and development gave way to transcendental ideas of veneration and admiration during Romanticism (Nash, 2001: 44; Plumwood, 1998). The idealization of primitivism; the association of wilderness with the sublime (and thus Godliness); and the realization that land was filling up while forests were also being cut led to an increasing appreciation and desire to preserve that which was wild and beautiful (Nash, 2001).

The catalyst for legal wilderness designation began in the late 19th century and the early 20th century with ideas concerning primitivism, preservation, and land ethics. It began at the turn of the century with people like American president Teddy Roosevelt (president for preservation of American land and culture) and with literary figures like Henry David Thoreau (1854, 1962). Support for legal designation gained momentum in the mid 20th century with folks like Aldo Leopold (forester and philosopher), Bob Marshall (millionaire, socialist, wilderness lover), and Howard Zanhaiser (major author of the 1964 Act) and organizations such as the Wilderness Society (founded in 1935 by eight men including Bob Marshall, Aldo Leopold, Benton MacKaye, and Robert Sterling Yard) and the Sierra Club (founded by John Muir in 1892). The 1964 Wilderness Act (Public Law 88-577) marked the fruition of the ideas, passions, and work of these and other visionaries before them. The 1964 Wilderness Act established the National Wilderness Preservation System in the United States which now includes over 108 million acres of public wilderness lands. Besides the Alaska National Interest Land Conservation Act (1980: Public Law 96-487), little else has matched the Wilderness Act in terms of the preservation of wild nature.

The Wilderness Act of 1964 contains several key ideological and practical definitions for understanding wilderness settings. The Act states, for example,

“A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain”; and that wilderness should have “outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation” and “may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value” (1964, Public Law 88-577).

Additionally, the Act prohibits (except where needed by management) certain uses such as commercial enterprises, permanent or temporary roads, motor vehicles, motorized equipment or

motorboats, aircrafts, mechanical transport, and permanent structures or installations (1964, Public Law 88-577: section 4c). The Wilderness Act can also be understood as a response to growing concerns about the domination and control of nature by human society. In Section 2(a), for example, the Act reads: “In order to assure that an increasing population, accompanied by expanding settlement and growing mechanization, does not occupy and modify all areas within the United States”(1964, Public Law 88-577). Looking at these legal parameters is particularly important for understanding the cultural context in which ‘wilderness’ came to be defined.

Re-conceptualizing Wilderness

To be sure, legally sanctioned wilderness preservations are important in the face of current human-nature relationships. First and foremost—they are valuable because they have the potential to save ecosystems, habitats, and animals from destruction and obliteration. Legal wilderness preservation also helps save the places that we love and cherish—places where we continue to find refuge, connection, and belonging. The language used in the Wilderness Act (1964, Public Law 88-577), however, tends to put the benefit of wilderness in the type of experience it offers for humans. Furthermore, conceptions of wilderness in the twentieth century have typically defined the space and activities therein as masculine and predominantly for men. This is first evidenced through the sheer numbers of male players in the foundation and evolution of wilderness preservation; but this exclusiveness is also found in some of the early rhetoric of rugged individualism and the taming of wildness which was procured by influential leaders like Teddy Roosevelt who organized the Boone and Crockett Club (1888) in order to preserve natural heritage, big-game hunting, virility, and masculinity (Neuwirth, 2009; Martin, 2004; Roosevelt, 1998). Roosevelt, for example, celebrated virtues such as sound body, firm mind, energy,

resolution, manliness, self-reliance, and capacity for self-help (Nash, 2001: 152). As Val Plumwood notes: “The normative exclusion of women is achieved not only by treating wilderness as the domain of masculinity defined as transcendent in opposition to the domestic, but also as the site of a masculinity defined in terms of physical toughness” (Plumwood, 1998: 662). Historical and legal wilderness definitions offer little in the way of describing “how women’s movements through wilderness affect its definition; nor does it describe the activities and locations of indigenous cultures and their efforts to shape their environments” (Gaard, 1997a: 6). Thus, part of this project is about documenting some of those narratives that have historically been missing from wilderness definitions and experiences (those of women and queers for example). Also implicit in early behavior and management in wilderness are notions of conquering, subduing, and control. In Australian contexts, wilderness has been critiqued for upholding Eurocentric views of humans as separate from nature—views which do not accurately represent colonial histories or the stories and relationships of the indigenous people (Plumwood, 1998; Rose 1996; Bayet, 1994; Langton, 1996). Others have argued that viewing remote and pristine wild lands as universally desirable and important for defining U.S. history is in fact a Eurocentric idea that overlooks the experiences of Blacks and Native Americans who may associate wilderness with a history of colonization and domination (Cronon, 1996; Johnson, 1998; Martin, 2004; Taylor, 2000; Gaard, 1997a).

Many believe that in order to address these issues requires that we look critically at Western culture’s colonial histories (Plumwood, 1998; Birch, 1990). What some wilderness and feminist philosophers and researchers call for is a re-conceptualization of what wilderness means in contemporary society in terms of race, class, gender, and sexuality¹. Especially important in

¹ This project aims to elucidate gender and sexuality in particular but recognizes the histories of colonization which include issues of race and class that are crucial to understanding notions of the Other in wilderness contexts.

this process is 1) looking critically at alienation and ‘Othering’ in Western society and re-conceptualizing human relationships with the wild Other (Plumwood, 1998; Gaard, 1997a; Birch, 1990); 2) understanding wilderness as a dynamic social, cultural, and ecological space; and 3) including *Other* perspectives in theoretical and empirical research on wilderness. By looking at what wilderness might mean in contemporary society, I do not wish to imply that we don’t need protected wilderness areas or that wilderness or wildness does not exist without or beyond human definitions. What I’m searching for rather is an understanding of how and why humans have and continue to justify the domination and oppression of the Earth and all those who inhabit it. Part of this search in particular aims to create a space for women and queers in wilderness and to understand narratives (from this study) about refuge, connection, and ecological belonging in wild places.

Wilderness, dualism, and Others

Within the current conception of wilderness are dualisms (culture/nature; male/female; mind/body; rationality/animality; civilized/primitive; public/private; subject/object; white/non-white; heterosexual/other sexualities) that perpetuate domination and unequal power relations between what is center and what is marginal—what is self and what is other. Embedded in wilderness definitions, for example, are notions of purity (empty/full; sacred/profane) and the absence of humans (empty/full). “Characterized by dualism,” for instance, “the process of representing Others inevitably defines norms and deviants, centres and margins, cores and peripheries, the powerful and the powerless” (Aitchison, 2003: 81). Eco-feminists such as Karen Warren and Val Plumwood, for example, have shown how these dualisms operate to perpetuate domination. In particular, they have outlined the conceptual links between the domination of

women and the domination of nature (or those labeled as ‘Other’) (Warren 1990; Plumwood, 1993). Karen Warren (1990) describes this oppression through the ‘logic of domination’: logic based on morally defined differences between humans and nature that connote superiority and justify domination. She explains with this example:

(B1) Women are identified with nature and the realm of the physical; men are identified with the ‘human’ and the realm of the mental.

(B2) Whatever is identified with nature and the realm of the physical is inferior to (‘below’) whatever is identified with the ‘human’ and the realm of the mental,

(B3) Thus, women are inferior to men.

(B4) For any X and Y, if X is superior to Y, then X is justified in subordinating Y.

(B5) Men are justified in subordinating women. (Warren, 1990: 130)

Val Plumwood (1998: 677) and Marilyn Frye (1983: 32) describe these dualisms in terms of dualistic polarities which include *radical separation* and *homogenization* that emphasizes difference between dualized pairs and sameness within each of the pairs, thus creating distance between the two groups and naturalizing domination. We can see these distinctions in the data mainly through the concept of escaping which separates wilderness from society, and thus people from nature. But what people find in wilderness is often about belonging and connection.

Dualistic distinctions between sex (male and female), gender (masculine and feminine), and sexuality (homosexuality and heterosexuality) are also embedded in the data, particularly in the stories of discrimination and negotiation (which are often about the distinctions between normal/abnormal). Part of re-envisioning human relationships with ‘Others’ means rejecting this radical separation and ‘reclaiming the ground of continuity’, and reclaiming differences that have been denied in order to fit into either/or categories (Plumwood, 1998: 677). Rejecting polarities, however, does not ask us to discard difference (between dualisms such as nature and culture), as difference alone does not imply value judgments (Plumwood, 1998). Indeed, equating culture

with nature does little more than extend value to everything cultural and human within nature.²

The argument prioritizes the cultural aspects within nature rather than recognizing any sort of intrinsic value or differences between the two.

Part of rejecting polarities includes rejecting definitions of wilderness based on purity (virginal/empty) and the absence of humans (empty) as such metaphors fail to recognize the agency of the earth and the continuities between culture and nature (Plumwood, 1998; Rose, 1996). In other words, defining wilderness and nature as what is not cultural is not only anthropocentric, it also leaves little room for nature in our everyday lives. The virgin metaphor (pure, untouched), for example, is again one of emptiness as human virgins and virgin lands are defined by male absence—they have not been filled. What is problematic then is that the woman and the land have been defined around the presence or absence of men or of people as the center for which all other things are given meaning. Such definitions ‘erase nature as a presence’ and deny agency, intrinsic value, and self-definition to that which is ‘virginal’. Thus part of re-envisioning the multiple meanings of wilderness necessitates that we *do not* define wilderness as the absence of people (empty, opposite of culture) but on the presence of nature (Plumwood, 1998). Looking at wilderness this way restores agency to nature—it gives meaning to nature beyond a marginal relationship to a cultural center. As Plumwood points out—there is a big difference between “perceiving the Other as an absence or emptiness versus perceiving the Other as another center, as fullness or *presence*” (Plumwood, 1998: 680).

Greta Gaard (1997a) also looks at *Othering* in Western culture to outline a nuanced account of *human alienation from nature*. She points out how alienation is experienced quite

² Equating nature with culture can be problematic because it produces ‘a human version of solipsism’ which argues ‘because the concept of wilderness is a human construct, wilderness itself must be a human construct, an argument which, stated badly, reveals itself to be a use-mention conflation’ (Plumwood, 1998: 673).

differently depending on where a person is positioned (as Other) in terms of race, class, gender, sexuality, and species (Gaard, 1997a). She argues that

“The critical point to remember is that the devalued ‘Other’ is ‘alienated from nature’ through some function of the culture created by the master; of course, each of the oppressed identity groups is simultaneously seen as ‘closer to nature’ in the dualisms and ideology of Western culture. This contradiction of distance and proximity is of no interest to the master, though such contradictions have been of great interest to feminists, who have argued that it is precisely such contradictions that characterize oppressive structures” (Gaard, 1997a: 9).

On gender, for example, Gaard highlights issues of fear and sexual assault/abuse as factors that contribute to women’s alienation from nature, wilderness, and from their bodies (1997a: 10). On sexuality, she also discusses how internalized homophobia can cause queers to become alienated from their bodies and sexualities³ and how “Like those subordinated by gender, queers may also fear the wilderness as a place where culture’s very few restraints on hate crimes will be entirely unloosed” (Gaard, 1997a: 11). These discussions raise compelling questions about the role of alienation and power (oppression) in gbtq experiences of wild places and are particularly important when evaluating some of the key stories in this study concerning refuge, connection, and belonging. Greta Gaard (1997a) explains an eco-feminist valuing of wilderness and a depiction of an eco-feminist ecological self; she does this by showing how wilderness experiences offer a different kind of “perceptual orienteering, a different way of locating oneself in relation to one’s environment” (1997a: 17). Here her focus is on physical, bodily, and sensual engagement with the natural world as she draws particular attention to space, energy, sight, smells, sounds, and sense of time. Her descriptions and explanations are both novel and familiar. In many, I am reminded of my own experiences and frustrations such as those mentioned with Priscilla (‘You smell! You should wear deodorant!’), for example, with poignant phrases like:

³ For more on queers and eco-feminism see also Greta Gaard (1997b), “Toward a Queer Ecofeminism,” *Hypatia* Vol. 12, no.1 (Winter 1997): 114-137.

“Whereas culture tells us the smell of human bodies (particularly sweat) is repellent and must be suppressed or erased, wilderness provides a context where the smell of the human body is often inescapable. For many, this smell comes to acquire new associations: the negative connotations of nervousness or shame Western culture associates with sweating might be replaced with more positive connotations of effort, challenge, or natural beauty” (1997a: 21).

Ultimately, Gaard calls for a re-visioning of the human-wilderness relationship by re-defining human identity as an animal identity; she argues that this identity dismantles the human-nature dualism because it locates humans in both culture and nature. Further—she says our identities as animals (Others) must also be embraced by the master-identity of Western culture. This study shows that in wilderness experiences there are ethical models about human/nature relationships. Feeling connected to our animal-selves through our bodies and through our vulnerability (as prey), for example, is largely about feeling that we are a part of an ecological system (ecological belonging); and it is in wilderness that we are particularly able to experience this belonging.

Similarly, Thomas Birch (1990) offers a re-construction of wilderness that does not advocate for the eradication of wilderness areas per se, but calls for a reframing of our justifications for and relationships with wildness. Like Plumwood and others, Birch strives to “expose the bad faith that taints our mainstream justifications for wilderness preservation” (1990: 6) which is based on “faulty presuppositions about otherness, about others of all sorts, both human and nonhuman, and consequently about the ‘practical necessities’ of our relationship with others” (1990: 7). He argues, for example, that the imperium approaches ‘Others’ as patronizingly tolerable or like enemies—as in opposition to rather than complementary. Further, Birch exclaims that wildness is confined, imprisoned, manipulated, simulated, and controlled through the ‘law bringing’ (legal designation) of the imperium and the management (fire, weeds, etc) of wilderness areas; he contends that conquest and oppression are lurking under the guise of preservation. He points out, for example, homocentric language used in the Wilderness Act of

1964; language which contradictorily treats wildness as a resource. He cites, for example, the aim of wilderness preservation is “to *secure* for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring *resource* of wilderness (Public Law #:88-577: Section 4(a)).

As Birch (1990) and Snyder (1990) point out, however, *wildness* cannot be completely extinguished. Even through its incarceration. Indeed, wildness is one of four features of wilderness that surfaced in this study and was described to be much like a feeling or an emotion; wildness was also described as unpredictable, boundless, explorative, potentiality, lawless, and unpatrollable. We also find wildness in our backyards, on the expressway, and in our food; everywhere we find “exquisite complex beings in their energy webs inhabiting the fertile corners of the urban world in accord with the rules of wild systems” (Snyder, 1990, pg 14-15). Moreover, Birch maintains that wildness is central to Otherness because it is uncontrollable and irrational—it is lawless. In wildness is freedom: freedom from social constraints and physical boundaries. It is the freedom for rivers to flow uninterrupted and to create or destroy as they will. Wildness is also instinctual, fertile, sexual, animalistic, innate, lustful, and un-tethered. In nature we find wildness and in wildness we find what is raw and honest; what is dangerous, bloody, dirty, and creative. In wildness, undeniably, we find that:

“Nature swells with sex, cooing, licking, flirting, courting, hinting, mating, and intimating: carnal knowledge, knowing, kenning, cunning. Every dragonfly is glued end to end to another. To every monkey an erection: to every insect, sackfuls of eggs, flowers bloom in smirking shapes of visual innuendo; leaves are protuberant; mushrooms conjugally fungal; every parrot on the squaw for it; every peccary rutting for it; every tendril internally sprung for it. Nothing unthrust. Nothing unfecund. Ripeness lusts till it rots, and its very rottenness makes a dank, warm bed for the next tight tip to poke through” (Griffiths, 2006, pg. 47-48).

Wildness is also autonomous and self-willed and to be in wildness is to be aware and alert: to survive. To have a wild experience is to discover something that cannot be categorized,

quantified, or chronicled. Undoubtedly, wildness is also inside us, a state of being, and through it we see the full range of feral human emotion: anger, pleasure, fear, love, and rage. “Our bodies are wild,” Gary Snyder explains, “The involuntary quick turn of the head at a shout, the vertigo at looking off a precipice, the heart-in-the-throat in a moment in danger, the catch of the breath, the quiet moments relaxing, staring, reflecting—all universal responses of this mammal body” (1990, pg. 16). These bodily responses can also be found in many of the wilderness stories in this study, particularly as they relate to ‘awakening of the body’ which includes things like sensual engagement with our surroundings, alertness and awareness of predators, and calming meditation. This bodily awakening in natural settings is part of what facilitates experiencing ourselves as animals and feeling connected to our environment. In wildness we can seek embodied experiences that embrace adventure, hunger, temptation, solitude (as a state of mind), predation, natural disaster, resilience, life, and death. As Jay Griffiths (2006) reminds us: “What is wild is not tilled. Self-willed land does what it likes, untilled, untold, while tilled land is told what to do” (41).

As such—Birch argues that wildness is central to resisting the law-bringing that the imperium (historical and current colonialism) is intent on enforcing. Simply making space for wildness within the imperium through legally designated wilderness areas does not, Birch contends, signify an ethic of right relation but rather an effort to complete the imperium’s domination. Similarly, in reference to the liberation of the female body through subversive acts—Judith Butler maintains that:

“The female body that is freed from the shackles of the paternal law may well prove to be yet another incarnation of that law, posing as subversive but operating in the service of that law’s self-amplification and proliferation. In order to avoid the emancipation of the oppressor in the name of the oppressed, it is necessary to take into account the full complexity and subtlety of the law and to cure ourselves of the illusion of a true body beyond the law. If subversion is possible, it will be a subversion from within the terms of

the law, though the possibilities that emerge when the law turns against itself and spawns unexpected permutations of itself. The culturally constructed body will then be liberated, neither to its ‘natural past’, nor its original pleasures, but to an open future of cultural possibilities” (Butler, 1990: 92).

Essential to Birch’s argument is also the ‘subversion of the imperium’; a subversion which re-envisioning relationships with *others* as not necessarily oppositional; embraces human participation in wild nature as a way to *resist* complete domination; and acknowledges that to *bring law to wildness* is ‘inappropriate as to be simply absurd’ (1990: 20). Birch concludes that

“If legally created wilderness areas do, or can be made to, serve the subversive role I have pointed out, then the laws that create them are thereby ethically justified” and that “Wilderness must be preserved for the right reasons—to help save the possibility and foster the practice of conscious, active, continuing human participation in wildness, as well as to preserve others for their own sakes” (1990: 25).

Resistance through participation in wildness and the subversive potential found in wilderness is an significant topic in this study. How participants conceptualize and experience resistance in relation to wilderness is explored in the results and discussion chapters of the thesis

Wilderness as Space

Spatial theories can also be helpful for understanding the multiple and dynamic meanings of wilderness. If we look at wilderness as a *space*, for example, that is dynamic, symbolic, relative, and contingent—we see that meanings attributed to this space are also flexible and dependent on social constructions and relationships of power (Aitchison 1999, 2003). We can understand the social construction of space through what Soja calls the *socio-spatial dialectic* “where social and spatial relations are dialectically inter-active, interdependent; that social relations of production are both space-forming and space-contingent” (Soja, 1989: 1). Indeed, meanings embedded in space reflect the identities of the people that use them but people can also shape and transform the meanings and uses of space through embodied performances.

Understanding that space has historically been used as a means of social control—we can see how space can both foster feelings of alienation and/or inclusion. Often, for example, spaces cement a sense of community while the people who frequent these spaces simultaneously endow them with meaning. At other times, people use space to resist such as during political protests or gay-pride marches. As Henry Lefebvre (1991) describes—social space is not a subject, object, or container with boundaries, but rather a set of relationships and forms between people and things.

Looking at wilderness as a social space is one way of understanding the multiple meanings of wilderness over time; in particular it helps us see how wilderness is no longer considered an exclusively masculine space. Wilderness has become more accessible to women (mostly middle/upper class and white); we find evidence of this in women's increasing participation in wilderness recreation, women's representation in media and women's specific outdoor gear, and women's contributions to the management of wild lands. Women have become increasingly part of the landscape of meanings attributed to wilderness. Noel Sturgeon (1997) explains this change and counters the claim that wilderness is necessarily a masculine domain by looking at the relationship and tensions between eco-feminism and ecology.

Current scholars in geography, tourism, and leisure studies, for example, have engaged critical theories about *Others* with *socio-spatial theory* and the role of *the gaze* to produce post-colonial critiques on spatialities of sexuality and gender. They draw particular attention to role space plays in shaping identity by looking at power, performance, and resistance (Aitchison, 2003). Although this area of research has not been extended to wilderness contexts—I think these concepts are particularly useful for looking at gender and wilderness. *The gaze*, for example, was first discussed by philosopher M. Foucault (1976: 89) and later in tourism studies by J. Urry (1990); and as Aitchison (2003) explains: “the power of the gaze is unequally

distributed and the object of the gaze is constructed according to the locus of power and control” (72). Associated with the gaze are Foucault’s theories on social and cultural surveillance such as video-recording and patrolling which have increasingly become a part of contemporary society (Foucault, 1979). Moreover, *objects* of the gaze are often those labeled Other in society such as women, queers, and other minorities; thinking critically about gazing from different positions of power is important for understanding privilege (white, able-bodied, heterosexual, male, and so on depending on the situation). In fact, the ‘gaze’ is conceptually very similar to ‘being seen’, which is an important finding in this study; understanding what it means to ‘be seen’, for example, is relevant to understanding wilderness as a refuge from judgments and un-accepting people (from normative gender specifically). The ‘gaze’ is also significant in understanding what James Hatley calls “the uncanny gaze of edibility” (2004), or what in this study I present as vulnerability (non-gendered) and ‘being seen by predators’ in wilderness.

Spatial theory is also used by contemporary geographers to demonstrate how the ‘normalization’ of heterosexuality is enacted through ‘performing heterosexuality’ in leisure and everyday spaces (Valentine 1993; Aitchison 2003; Bell and Valentine, 1995) as well as how people use spaces to *resist or subvert* such ‘dominant spatial identities’ through the transformation of existing spaces and/or the creation of alternative spaces (Aitchison, 2003; Aitchison, 1999; Skeggs, 1999; Pritchard, Morgan, and Sedgley, 2007). As indicated in the introduction chapter, part this study aims to investigate if and how gbtq ‘females’ experience wilderness as a space for resisting dominant norms concerning gender, sex, and sexuality. Understanding wilderness as a gendered and sexualized space allows us to look at the multiple and shifting meanings of wilderness experiences for people from different socio-cultural backgrounds. Johnson and Kivel (2007), for example, urge leisure and sport scholars to “ask how

lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people are policed in their leisure and sport, especially when the space is constructed in and among heterosexual discourses” (Johnson and Kivel, 2007: 103). Because wilderness often lacks surveillance—it offers interesting terrain to look at the role of the gaze in the gendering of space as well as the implications for *how* people experience gender in wild places.

Including ‘Other’ Perspectives

The call from wilderness and feminist philosophers to re-conceptualize what wilderness means in contemporary society I think necessitates undertaking empirical research aimed at elucidating the perspectives and experiences of *Others*. This research aimed to capture the voices and stories of those Others (Results Chapter); those experiences will be closely examined in the discussion chapter as they speak back to the theoretical literature on gender, oppression, and wilderness.

FEMINIST PHILOSOPHIES OF GENDER

“When we ask, ‘What is a woman,’ we are really asking questions about ideology: about how discourse has contoured the category of ‘woman’ and about what is at stake—politically, economically, socially—in maintaining or dismissing that category” ~ Conboy, Medina, and Stanbury, 1997: 1

“To be present in the world implies strictly that there exists a body which is at once a material thing in the world and a point of view toward this world; but requires nothing that this body have this or that particular structure” ~ Simone de Beauvoir, 1953: 7

Post-structural feminist theories on gender are useful for understanding how people experience gender in wilderness contexts because they illustrate the diversity of gendered

experiences in various socio-cultural contexts. They also demonstrate how past and contemporary Western society continues to oppress the female gender and discipline the female body. Feminist have, for example, revealed how gender is a performance of stylized acts rather than a natural state of being (Butler, 1990); how cultural discourses have socially constructed the female body as a docile, sexualized, and controlled object (Foucault, 1978, 1979; Bordo 1993; Bartky 1988); how hierarchical and dualistic thinking in Western philosophy justifies the domination of 'Others' such as women and nature (Warren, 1990; Plumwood 1993); how human existence is defined by particular situations in historical and social contexts (de Beauvoir, 1953); and how cultural and social situations of women affect how they experience their lived bodies (Young, 1980). Setting the stage for these social critiques were early post-war (1945-1965) feminist scholars such as Mira Komarovsky (sociology), Viola Kelien (sociology), Ruth Herschberger (independent research), Margret Mead (Anthropology), and Simone de Beauvoir (philosophy) who "collectively gave us the vocabulary for understanding how society creates and enforces ideals of femininity and the tools for analyzing the political dimensions of sex-role ideology" (Tarrant, 2006: 3).

As a result, many feminists since the 1960's have focused on theorizing and critiquing the distinctions between sex (biological) and gender (sociological and cultural). Early on, these critiques aimed mainly to battle the oppressive effects of biological determinism and essentializing the female sex. "Considered as an essence," for example, "sex becomes immobile, stable, coherent, fixed, prediscursive, natural, and ahistorical: the mere surface on which the script of gender is written" (Moi, 1999: 4). Indeed, the suggestion that gender and sex were not fixed or natural but rather flexible and culturally constituted made liberation possible in that women were able to conceive of a different way of being in this world.

Anne Fausto-Sterling (2000) challenges the idea, for example, that sex is purely biological (i.e. also a social construction) by examining the history of hermaphroditism⁴ and the invisibility of intersexuals on the sexual continuum. She reports that intersexuals make up 1.7 percent of all births (Fausto-Sterling, 2000: 51). Furthermore, she shows how surgeons, modern technology, fear of stigma, and rigid social sexual categories all support and reaffirm a mythic two-sex system; a system which demands the surgical elimination of intersexuality at birth. Understanding that contemporary Western (and historical) society has little room for transitory sexed bodies (primary or secondary sex characteristics) is important for understanding the discrimination (and negotiation) a person might face when pursuing behaviors, dress, and ways of being that are either 1) not congruent with gender/sex expectations or 2) not distinctly male or female, perhaps embody a little of both. It's important to note that the data reveal these human judgments may contribute to feelings of alienation from our bodies and from society and are a part of why some people in this study might experience wilderness as a refuge from normative gender.

Judith Butler, in *Gender Trouble*, defines gender as “the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (Butler, 1990: 33). We perform gender, for example, through body language, speech, dress, and relationships. These ‘performances’ may go unnoticed or be subconsciously enacted, while at other times they can be quite deliberate, subversive, and strategic. Gender is further complicated by sexuality. In deconstructing heterosexuality we see that it is built on polarized gender categories that correspond to polarized sex categories. Foucault (1978) explains that these categories create an ‘artificial unity’ through

⁴ Anne Fausto-Sterling notes that the term hermaphrodite is considered derogatory within the intersexed community (2000). She uses the term when describing historical contexts.

acts of sex; this ‘artificial unity’ normalizes and naturalizes heterosexuality. In this way, heterosexuality also becomes compulsory and is used as a powerful method of social control to subjugate non-heterosexuals (Rich 1993; Johnson and Kivel, 2007). In the debate on gender, sex, sexuality, desire, and performance—queer theory also questions the way we think about these categories. As Johnson and Kivel (2007) explain, “queer subverts the privilege, entitlement, and status obtained through compulsive heterosexuality and questions how heteronormative behaviors enacted by both heterosexuals and homosexuals function to maintain heterosexuality’s dominance” (102).

Other feminist such as Susan Bordo (1989, 1993) and Sandra Lee Bartky (1988) have studied the body as text by focusing on the cultural discourses that define and police femininity. Susan Bordo (1989), drawing from Foucault (1978, 1979), outlines how discourses around femininity fashion the female body as a ‘docile body’ and how these discourses operate as a measure of social control. Indeed, we need not look far to find these disciplinary powers—for they are everywhere and everyone. They are our parents, teachers, and bosses. They are both strangers and old friends. They are ourselves. These disciplinarians, however, are not part of a formal institution and therefore can appear illusive, thus leading many to believe that this thing we call femininity is innate and voluntary. Bartky (1988) notes, for example, that these disciplinarian practices “must be understood as aspects of a far larger discipline, an oppressive and inegalitarian system of sexual subordination” (in Conboy, Medina, and Stanbury, 1997: 143). The consequences for ‘females’ in the context of such bodily disciplines include (but are not limited to) shame, self-policing of appearance, motivation to consume (buy products to maintain appearance and fashions), decreased self-esteem, and eating and other psychological disorders. Bordo says, for example,

“Through the enacting and normalizing disciplines of diet, make-up, and dress—central organizing principles of time and space in the days of many women—we are rendered less socially oriented and more centripetally focused on self-modification. Through these disciplines, we continue to memorize on our bodies the feel and conviction of lack, insufficiency, of never being good enough. At the farthest extremes, the practices of femininity may lead us to utter demoralization, debilitation, and death” (Bordo, 1989: 14).

People in American society also do not typically encourage girls or women to have muscular physiques or competent strong bodies. Girls who engage in ‘masculine’ sports, for example, risk the stigma of being labeled lesbians just as boys risk being labeled gay for engaging in ‘feminine’ sporting activities (Messner, 2002). Gender-role socialization, for example, has been identified as one major constraint to women’s participation in outdoor adventure programs (Warren, 1996b) and lack of sense of competence has been shown to greatly inhibit female development in outdoor skills and leadership (Loeffler, 1995, 1997). The consequences of this ‘discouragement’ speak to controlling, dominating, and inhibiting the female body. McDermott (1996), for example, looks at the concept of physicality to uncover the processes (and social forces) by which women learn to “become physically passive and alienated from their bodies” (25). Moreover, Bartky (1988) points out that “An aesthetic of femininity, for example, that mandates fragility and a lack of muscular strength produces female bodies that can offer little resistance to physical abuse, and the physical abuse of women by men, as we know, is widespread” (in Conboy, Medina, and Stanbury, 1997: 140). Wilderness stories found in this study’s data about strength, self-reliance, and experiencing and loving the body as useful (rather than a focus on appearance, modification, and objectification for example) therefore make a compelling case for the therapeutic and social value of wilderness experiences for women.

Feminist phenomenologists have also weighed in on the gender and sex debate. Within this field, Butler (1990) has been criticized for her focus on discourse (and not bodies) in her

analysis of gender and performance, as well as her inability to go beyond the sex/gender distinction and provide examples for how to describe lived experiences (Moi 2001; Young 2005). Although Toril Moi acknowledges that there are feminist projects that can benefit from distinguishing between sex and gender, she advocates that feminism replace the concept of gender with that of the lived body (1999, 2001). Unlike post-structural theorists, Moi argues that ‘the distinction between sex and gender is simply irrelevant to the task of producing a concrete, historical understanding of what it means to be a woman (or a man) in a given society’ (1999: 4-5). This research documents lived bodily experiences in wilderness while also evaluating the role gender (as defined by participants) still plays in those contexts/situations for participants of this study. The lived body, for example, is not necessarily biologically male or female but a physical body in a particular situation. In this way, “The idea of the lived body thus can bring the physical facts of different bodies into theory without the reductionist and dichotomous implications of the category ‘sex’” (Young, 2005: 17).

In addition, Sandra Lee Bartky (1990), Simone de Beauvoir (1953), and Iris Marion Young (1980) have drawn from existential phenomenology’s ideas of *situatedness* of the *lived body* to theorize “women’s gender-specific experience” (Young, 2005: 4). Young (1980), in her classic work, “Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment, Motility and Spatiality,” explains three modalities of feminine motility: ambiguous transcendence, inhibited intentionality, and discontinuous unity with surroundings. She explains how these modalities

“have their root in the fact that feminine existence does not experience the body as a mere thing—a fragile thing, which must be picked up and coaxed into movement, a thing which exists as *looked at and acted upon*. To be sure, any lived body exists as a material thing as well as a transcending subject. For feminine bodily existence, however, the body is often lived as a thing which is other than it, a thing like other things in the world” (Young, 1980: 148).

From a very early age, girls learn to be careful; they learn to walk, sit, stand, and move about like a girl. We learn fragility, confinement, and timidity. We learn that “to open [our] body in free active and open extension and bold outward directedness is for a woman to invite objectification” (Young, 1980: 154). Body comportment, motility, and spatiality can be understood then through a gendered lens—whereby both men and women are socialized to use their bodies in certain ways; ways which I have tried to show can be oppressive and restrictive. Importantly, the results of this study indicate that in wilderness there is space to freely express our bodies/ourselves without judgment or patrol.

GENDER RESEARCH

Past Research in Leisure Studies

Research on women in leisure studies began in the early 1980s and has since then evolved to include diverse methodological approaches that aim at capturing the multiple meanings of ‘woman’ and ‘leisure’ (Henderson and Hickerson, 2007: 591). In the 1980s studies on women in leisure were largely concerned with defining a commonly shared leisure experience for women with a particular focus on leisure constraints. Within the context of third-wave feminism, leisure studies of women in the early 1990s began to expose the diversity of women living in Western culture and thus the diversity of leisure experiences and constraints associated with these differences. In the late 1990s, leisure studies began critiquing previous approaches to gender and began to focus on the gendered ideologies that shape men and women’s experience in society (Henderson and Hickerson, 2007).

Most recently, Henderson and Hickerson (2007) outline two categories in their review of women in leisure studies: premises and performances. They found the two main premises underlying the conceptual understandings of women, gender, and leisure were 1) gender/critical theory and 2) *gender* resistance/leisure choices (Henderson and Hickerson, 2007). *Physical activity as a choice*, for example, was found to be an increasing area of interests within leisure studies (Henderson and Hickerson, 2007). Importantly, they note that Shaw's (2001) study on resistance reveals how women's leisure operates as a political practice. In addition, three themes surfaced under the category performances including constraints in context, women's leisure and social factors, and active leisure (Henderson and Hickerson, 2007). Henderson and Hickerson (2007) recommend that

“Although the analysis are more complex than mere descriptions of women's leisure, more is yet to be explained such as how various identities of women facilitate or constrain their leisure, how leisure is gendered for both women and men, and the implications of culture and other social ecological parameters on women's leisure” (604). Additionally, they note the potential of post-structural theory as a way of understanding

women's leisure as well as the move by some researchers to understand gender beyond its association with just women (i.e. masculinity; and I would add transgendered). Post-structural theory can lead to such an understanding because it challenges the binary constructions of male/female; masculine/feminine; and homosexual/heterosexual while also illuminating the myriad of ways power and oppression play out in Western society. This study both employs post-structural theory and seeks to understand gender beyond its relevance to just women.

Past research in Outdoor/Experiential Education

Research on gender in outdoor experiential education has added much to our understandings of the empowering and therapeutic effects of outdoor adventures and education

for women (Mitten, 1992; Warren, 1996a) as well as how to create equitable outdoor educational programs (Clemmenssen, 2002, Warren, 1996b, 2002; Irish, 2006); and how to foster leadership/careership for women in the outdoors (Bell, 1996; Allin and Humberston, 2006). Scholars in this field have researched a variety of topics including: feminist ethics and philosophies in outdoor education and outdoor leadership (Mitten, 1996a, 1996b; Henderson, 1996; Bell 1996; Loeffler, 1997; Warren and Loeffler, 2000); body image and challenging idealized femininity in the outdoors (Mitten, 2010; Wittinton, 2006); the damage of lesbian baiting in outdoor education (McClintock, 1996b); gender systems and gender socialization in outdoor education (Pinch, 2003, 2007; Jordan, 1996); wilderness therapy for rape and incest survivors (Rohde, 1996; Ross, 2003); wilderness therapy for troubled and recovering women or girls (Caulkins et al., 2006; Price, 2000); outdoor recreation and women of color (Roberts and Drogin, 1996; Roberts, 1996); sexual harassment in outdoor education (Loeffler, 1996); and single-gendered outdoor trips (McClintock, 1996a).

Feminist approaches to Leisure and Outdoor/Experiential Education

Feminist and gender theories can contribute much to our understandings of gender in leisure contexts (Aitchison, 2001, 2003; Henderson and Hickerson, 2007; Fox, 1992; Johnson and Kivel, 2007). Fundamental to feminist contributions have been the critical evaluation of epistemology in the social sciences as we continue to ask questions like: What do we know about leisure and gender and by what process do we claim to know it? Ultimately, these questions examine how research philosophies and methodologies inform empirical investigations about gender, leisure, and society. Within leisure and sport studies of gender, both feminist and masculinist viewpoints demonstrate the social constructions of the body and thus the opportunity

for transcending gender constraints and uncovering “the diversity of individual subjectivities that can be constructed around embodiment” (Wearing, 1998: 109). In outdoor experiential education, Karen Warren and T.A. Loeffler (2000) also call for the inclusion of critical and feminist theoretical approaches to research. They advocate for social justice research that looks critically at the experiences of oppression and emancipation; research that allows marginal voices to play a part in knowledge construction (Warren and Loeffler, 2000: 86). Recent studies in both leisure studies and experiential education demonstrate the value of using post-structural approaches to gender—and recognizing the myriad of ways gender manifests for people beyond just male and female. This thesis builds upon previous gender research in outdoor education by adding to our understandings of gender, oppression, body, and wilderness while also attempting to answer the call by scholars in the field to implement critical feminist and gender theory and methodology into research projects.

Gender and the Outdoors

Much of the empirical research on gender and the outdoors comes from leisure studies and outdoor experiential education. Several scholars from these fields have employed feminist approaches to research on gender and the outdoors. To the best of my knowledge, most of the research on gender (and the body) in the outdoors has focused on women and empowerment (Beale, 1988; Brace-Govan, 1997; Burden and Kiewa 1992; Mason-Cox, 1992; Miranda and Yerks, 1985; Scherl, 1990; McDermott 2000a). As Betsy Wearing (1998) points out:

“When women do make the effort to refuse what they have been told they are and to reach towards their potential in the area of bodily movement and the use of space, there is some evidence from the leisure literature of a corresponding increase in self-confidence and a new and exciting awareness of bodily power” (Wearing, 1998: 110).

An increasing yet still underexplored area of study looks at how women experience their bodies and physicalities in the outdoors (McDermott, 2000a, 2000b, 2004). Likewise, this thesis attempts to document how ‘women’ experience their bodies in the outdoors. While the results sometimes speak to a gendered experience in wilderness (refuge, vulnerability) and possibly to a gbtq wilderness experience (refuge), they also speak more broadly to a human-animal experience or a lived experience of body in situation (connection to animal self, ecological belonging). This research diverges from much of the previous research foci on empowering women to look more broadly at the overarching ethical models that we might find in wilderness.

Gender and Wilderness

Most of the research that looks at gender and wilderness also focuses on women and empowerment (Angell 1994; Bialeschki & Henderson 1993; Kohn 1991; Mitten 1994; Powch 1994; Hart & Silka 1994; Stopha 1994; Pohl 1998; Pohl, Borrie, and Patterson, 2000). In particular, feminists have looked critically at the therapeutic value of wilderness experiences for women (Cole et al. 1994) including research on body image (Arnold 1994; McDermott 2000a); adventure model critiques (Powch, 1994; Mitten, 1994); change and self-efficacy in women’s ropes courses (Stopha, 1994; Hart and Silka, 1994); female only canoeing trips (McDermott 2004); and wilderness experiences for incest and rape survivors (Asher et al., 1994, Levine, 1994) and emotionally disturbed girls (Levitt, 1994). Pohl, Borrie, and Patterson (2000) note that “Although past research has chipped away at many of the ambiguities surrounding the therapeutic value of wilderness, researchers fail to completely explain not only the full therapeutic potential of wilderness, but also the potential value of wilderness *in relation to*

gender” (Pohl, Borrie, and Patterson, 2000: 417). In their qualitative study, ‘Women, Wilderness and Everyday Life’, Pohl, Borrie, and Patterson (2000) found that wilderness recreation manifests in women’s everyday lives through self-sufficiency, shift in perspective, connection to others, and mental clarity (2000: 415). Yerkes and Miranda (1982) also looked at how wilderness experiences transfer to women’s everyday lives; they found that women were less inhibited by gender roles.

Gender and wilderness research has also examined gender roles and socialization in organizational and educational settings. Neuwirth (2009), for example, analyzed the intersections of nature, gender, and organizational socialization in two wilderness therapy programs and found ‘their design templates and informal processes, including their modes of organizational socialization, their use of the rite of passage model, and their male-based narratives, skills, and language, all prioritize and perpetuate culturally masculine ways of being in the world’ (27). Pinch (2003) notes that naturalization of gender based on biological sex is present throughout the experiential education literature but that practices and theories that outdoor educators employ should be critically evaluated as well. She observed that practitioners used covert strategies to cultivate gender equity within the groups such as changing leadership so that males didn’t dominate this role and encouraging girls in their physical abilities. Pinch suggests, however, that practitioners should address gender more explicitly and openly particularly in the reflective exercises that are used to facilitate meaning-making of participant’s experiences. The present strategies, Pinch explains, “expect participants to intuitively absorb lessons that question gender roles” (Pinch, 2003: 349).

Wittmer (2001) uses psychological research (gender-role theory) on gender and leadership to show how women are negatively evaluated in leadership positions when they

display gender-role in-congruency. Gender role theory says that people develop expectations of people based on what is appropriately male or female; gender-role congruency then is the degree to which that person fulfills those gendered expectations (Eagly et al., 1992). Wittmer looks at how gender-role congruency applies to outdoor and wilderness education contexts by first showing how leadership roles are already male-dominated in American society; a leadership role that is, for a woman, further incongruent in the outdoors where masculine leadership styles and attributes are more valued (Wittmer, 2001: 174). Wittmer states that:

“Gender role expectations suggest that masculine leaders are autonomous, organized, task-oriented (Guido-DiBrito, Noteboom, Nathan, and Fenty, 1995), controlling, unemotional, directive, assertive (Rojahn and Willemsen, 1994), autocratic, dominating, or independent (Eagly et al., 1992). Feminine leaders, on the other hand are mediating, facilitating, less efficient, less action-oriented (Rogers, 1995), understanding, helpful, warm (Rojahn and Willemsen), democratic, unselfish, collaborative, interpersonally oriented, concerned with others, or emotionally expressive (Eagly)” (Wittmer, 2001: 174).

Paradoxically, however, when women outdoor leaders use more masculine leadership styles, they receive negative reactions and evaluations from participants. Further, Wittmer states that men have more options in leadership styles as they do not face the same resistance when displaying gender-role in-congruency (Wittmer, 2001: 175). She suggests that the best leaders use various leadership styles that are appropriate to situations, not to gender expectations. To break down gender-role expectations so that women can effectively lead wilderness education, Wittmer suggests that leaders identify leadership styles and internal biases; create awareness in colleagues of gender-role expectations; and mentor program participants in becoming effective leaders (2001). She also suggests single-gender space to help participants explore their potential; she is astute to point out that having individuals choose either male or female might exclude people who don't identify as one or the other such people who are transgendered (Wittmer, 2001: 177). She suggests forming a third group for those who prefer not to choose.

Similarly, Warren (2002) makes recommendations for training race, gender, and class sensitive outdoor leaders. In examining the current literature on race, Warren finds that most of the literature focuses on developing opportunities for people of color rather than developing race sensitive outdoor leadership (Warren, 2002). Along with Meyer (1994), Warren urges educators to include more culturally appropriate wilderness programming that goes ‘beyond tolerance and diversity’ (Meyer, 1994: 11). Asher, Huffaker, and McNally (1994) also argue for more culturally appropriate wilderness programming and wilderness therapy that address issues of white privilege and Afrocentric values such as family, harmony of nature, spontaneity, same-race support systems, and creative expression (Warren, 2002: 232). Warren (2002) suggest that the extant research on gender and outdoor leadership and teaching is more extensive and has therefore evolved further than looking at the social identities and inequities of race and class within outdoor education. She notes, however, that although many scholars have demonstrated the benefits of feminist outdoor leadership approaches—mainstream outdoor literature does not embrace gender-sensitive training for the next generation of leaders (Warren, 2002: 232). Moreover, Warren points out that most outdoor leadership jobs privilege applicants who have completed expensive formal leadership training field schools; that most outdoor leadership jobs lack job security; and thus many working class people would not be as likely to invest money in a job that also lacks security (Warren, 2002: 234). Warren provides a prototype of a social justice training that includes five main outcomes: self-awareness, understanding privilege, planned action steps, theory and content, and community building (2002: 235). The overarching concerns of the training include: starting where participants are; establishing a safe space; tendency toward addressing gender issues; and valuing social justice skills the same as technical skills (Warren, 2002: 235). Warren also makes further recommendations for incorporating social

justice into outdoor leadership which include: using experiential education methodology; offering outdoor social justice training in all avenues open to future outdoor leaders; developing outdoor leadership literature that reflects growing concern for social justice in the field; making social justice training a consistent part of hiring criteria in the field; and sharing social justice practice in formal networks (Warren, 2002: 236-237). The research findings of Warren (2002), Wittmer (2001), and Pinch (2003, 2007) are important for understanding the gendered landscape found in wilderness and outdoor education programs. What they illuminate is the need for social justice imperatives in outdoor education training. Research that illuminates women, queer, and transgendered perspectives, for instance, could be informative for how to approach gender role socialization in educational settings.

Lisa McDermott (1996, 2000a, 2004) emphasizes the relative dearth (within leisure studies) and need for research that looks at how women experience their lived bodies in physical activities and outdoor settings. McDermott (1996) looks at the body as a site of female empowerment rather than as an object of patriarchal oppression and she advocates for looking at bodies in situation as they are experienced by women. Conceptualizing physicality within the context of women's lives, she argues, helps to illuminate how "physicality centered around male power and masculinity have operated to limit the physical potentials of women within physical activity/sport" and "helps to eradicate the popular, yet socially constructed belief, that physicality, as it is experienced through physical activity, is synonymous with male physical power and masculinity, thereby extending the range of valued characteristics associated with it" (McDermott, 1996: 26). McDermott (2000a) also investigates the significance of body perception for women by looking at two different types of physical activities: wilderness canoeing and aerobics. In this study, she found that body perception surfaced in two ways: as a

factor initiating involvement or as a perception of it emerging through the experience (2000: 356). She also found that most women in the project demonstrated Young's (1980) 'feminine bodily existence'. From this research—McDermott again concludes that young girls and women need to experience their active bodies beyond appearance and objectification; they need to “have positive and meaningful experiences of their physicalities through physical activity that are not framed through dominant ideologies of femininity” (2000a, 357). McDermott (2004) looks at physicality and women's female-only canoeing; she finds that women chose to participate in female-only canoeing because of the 1) the opportunity to meet and be with other women, 2) perception of gender-equality in single-gender settings, and 3) desire to learn and perform canoeing skills in female-only context (289). This research supports the importance of female-only canoeing experiences as a means for women⁵ to connect to their bodies and to have positive gender-resistive physical experiences (McDermott, 2004: 293). Following McDermott's work, this research seeks to document lived bodily experiences of women and queers in the outdoors and to explore the meanings of 'gender-resistive' physical experiences in wilderness.

CONCLUSIONS

The literature review shows that there is a need for empirical research on gender and wilderness. Overall, empowerment and resistance represent the common threads between research on wilderness and gender. Post-modern theoretical work on these topics reveals the need to include the lived experiences of *Others* to substantiate claims made about the contemporary meanings of wilderness. Much of this eco-feminist literature has focused on de-constructing the culture-nature dichotomy and re-envisioning wilderness as a site of resistance.

⁵ McDermott (2004) notes that this may not be true for all women as some women today develop physical and athletic competence but that most women are not encouraged to do so. Gender-specific physical experiences are then particularly important for those who have developed Young's 'feminine bodily existence' (299).

What is sometimes missing from this vision, however, is empirical research that looks at the perspectives and voices of people that exist in the margins.

Past research in leisure studies and experiential education demonstrate how outdoor experiences can be liberating and empowering for women. Much of the past leisure research on gender has looked at constraints and current research on this topic has started to incorporate critical theories and look at women's leisure as a political act of resistance. Little has been done, however, to look at gender and wilderness beyond empowerment and beyond the categories of male and female. Gender and feminist research in the outdoors has for the most part been equated with research about improving the lives of women while voices of transgendered folk are relatively non-existent and human relationships with nature are still underexplored. While empowerment remains an important facet of feminist research and while this research is no doubt indispensable, I believe the focus on improvement and empowerment fails to address the myriad of ways that women/people experience the outdoors, nature, and wilderness. For these reasons, I hesitate to start this project with a vision of empowerment as a means to understand gender, oppression, and wilderness experiences and by extension the human/nature relationship.

Clearly, there are significant gaps in our knowledge about gender and wilderness and taking a feminist approach to this project is beneficial both theoretically and methodologically. As this literature review demonstrates, feminist and gender theory provides an important foundation for understanding gender (and the gendered body) in particular social and cultural frameworks—of which include leisure and outdoor contexts. Examining wilderness experiences from a feminist post-structural framework allows a nuanced account of gender in wilderness to emerge. This account could make valuable contributions to our contemporary understandings of wilderness and may also be beneficial for wilderness managers, educators, and philosophers.

The following chapter is an in-depth examination of the methodology, data collection, and analysis used in the project.

CHAPTER THREE—METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

The purpose of this project is to explore, describe, and explain how people experience gender and body in wilderness settings. I am interested in understanding subjective dimensions of these experiences which are also embedded in dynamic cultural contexts. Gendered bodily experiences, for instance, are subjective in that they vary according to how a person experiences things such as vulnerability, discrimination, and oppression; these are often indicative of women and gbtq experiences. In other words, it is not measurement or prediction that I seek but meaning and understanding. Meaning-directed models of behavior are the property of individual experience, particularly about phenomena that we cannot directly measure. Moreover, “the goal of feminist scholarship is not control or prediction but understanding, inclusion, and social change” (Fox, 1992: 342). In order to realize these goals, I chose a qualitative interpretive paradigm for the overall research approach and in-depth/semi-structured interviews as a means of data collection. To clarify, this research defines a *philosophical orientation* as a ‘worldview that underlies and informs methodology and methods’; *methodology* as ‘a way of thinking about and studying social phenomena’; and *methods* as ‘techniques and procedures for gathering and analyzing data’ (Corbin and Strauss, 2008: 1). Overall, the research questions were philosophical in nature and inspired by a feminist-phenomenological orientation; the empirical research, however, ultimately calls upon the methodological imperatives and analytic tools (methods) of feminism and grounded theory.

The value of qualitative analysis in general and grounded theory analysis in particular is based on five criteria: credibility, resonance, usefulness, and originality (Charmaz 2006), and quality (Corbin and Strauss 2008). Each of these criteria helped guide the analysis of this

project. First, to make analyses *credible* requires researchers to make the research process transparent and accessible to readers. Researchers should provide sufficient evidence that would allow readers to make independent judgments about the analysis. In striving for credibility, researchers should also ask questions such as: Has your research achieved intimate familiarity with the setting or topic? Are the data sufficient to merit your claims? Do the categories cover a wide range of empirical observations? And are there strong logical links between the gathered data and your argument and analysis? (Charmaz, 2006: 182). Looking at the criteria of *resonance*, this research asks: Do the categories portray the fullness of the studied experience? Have you revealed both liminal and unstable taken-for granted meanings? Does your grounded theory make sense to your participants or people who share their circumstances? (Charmaz, 2006: 182-183). Similarly, analyses are *useful* in that they are relevant to people's everyday lives, contribute to knowledge-building and understanding, and help inspire future research endeavors (Charmaz, 2006: 183). *Original* analyses provide new conceptual understandings and fresh categories and insights; original analyses also have social and theoretical significance and perhaps "challenge, extend, or refine current ideas, concepts, and practices" (Charmaz, 2006: 182). Juliet Corbin explains that *quality* findings have an "innovative, thoughtful, and creative component" (Corbin and Strauss, 2008: 301) that "has substance, gives insight, shows sensitivity" (302). She describes quality research as something that is "creative in its conceptualizations but grounded in data"; it is research that "stimulates discussion and further research on the topic" (Corbin and Strauss, 2008:302).

This chapter begins with a section explaining the use and appropriateness of in-depth/semi-structured interviews for feminist and grounded theory methodologies. The next section includes an overview of the role of the researcher in interpretive research and a

positionality statement from the researcher. Next, I describe the interview process as it unfolds from initial contact until after analysis; here I also explain the use of each interview question as well their transformations throughout the data collection process. Following this section I provide a brief description of the study participants, purposes of the sample, and the sampling strategy. This chapter closes with a detailed description of the data collection and analysis process.

In-depth interviews, feminist commitments, and grounded theory

All of the data for this analysis was drawn from in-depth/semi-structured interviews including thirteen face-to-face and seven phone interviews. Three follow-up/post-interview letters from one interviewee were also used in data analysis with permission of the participant. In-depth interviewing is a flexible and an adaptable data collection technique that is useful for gathering rich descriptions and stories about peoples' experiences in various social-cultural contexts and about particular phenomena. Additionally, semi-structured interviewing allows the data to emerge from the interview process and gives more weight and voice to those being interviewed. In-depth and semi-structured interviews were appropriate for this study because they 1) facilitated the telling of alternative narratives for oppressed groups, 2) allowed unknown concepts about gender, body, and wilderness to emerge, and 3) produced the powerful and vividly detailed data that makes qualitative research worthwhile and particularly informative.

First, in-depth and semi-structured interviews as a means of data collection are consistent with post-structuralist feminist methodological commitments. Indeed, feminist scholars are well-known for theorizing and looking critically at qualitative research *processes* by exposing un-

equal power relations and other ethical dilemmas. Looking critically at this *process* means more than just getting approval from ethical review boards; it means configuring ethics into every methodological decision. Ann Oakley (1981) was perhaps one of the first feminists to problematize the paradigms of traditional *interviewing* in the social sciences. She rightly points out, for instance, how focusing on detachment and objectivity creates gaps in theory and praxis, especially for feminist researchers who aim to gather and validate subjective experiences of women (Oakley, 1981). (On this point, however, I would qualify the focus on ‘experiences of women’ to ‘experiences of oppressed individuals/groups’ as my definition of feminism is more about addressing the many faces of oppression rather than just addressing the oppression of women.) In any case and as many other social science researchers have since recognized—Oakley demonstrates that the interview is a two-way conversation involving the give and take of information for both interviewer and interviewee; interviewees are not mere objects and/or data—they are people and should be treated as such; and the interview has significance and meaning as a social interaction that extends beyond the confines of the research (Oakley, 1981). Because these issues are important to me—I use in-depth/semi-structured interviewing as a data collection technique; a technique that can 1) critically address the power relations between the researcher and the researched by tackling issues of authority and representation; 2) support dialogue about silenced sexualities and gender-relations 3) foster empowerment through ‘talking’, 4) encourage the telling of alternative narratives for oppressed groups, and 5) help build theory from lived experiences. I will re-visit these goals in the discussion chapter to see how well the interviewing did in accomplishing them.

“Even if perceived ‘authorities’ writing about a group to which they do not belong and/or over which they yield power, are progressive, caring, and right-on in every way, as long as their authority is constituted by either the absence of the voices of the individuals whose experiences they seek to address, or the dismissal of those voices as unimportant, the subject-object dichotomy is maintained and domination is reinforced” ~ bell hooks 1989: 43

Power dynamics shift between researcher and researched within and between interviews and throughout the research process; acknowledging and looking critically at these shifts remains central to feminist methodologies (Scharff, 2010). Researchers might, for example, exercise a certain *authority* when they choose research questions and make decisions about data selection, analysis, and publication (Letherby, 2003: 78). Interviewees, however, also have *power* and *agency* during in-depth interviews. In fact, it is their stories and their words that the researcher is seeking and that the researcher needs to develop concepts and theories. Participants have the power to deny access to this information and it is they who choose what stories to tell and how to present themselves through the information they share (Phoenix 1994 and Letherby 2003 in Scharff 2010). Interviews and research processes thus become shared experiences and representing findings gained from these experiences requires researchers to look critically at their own privilege perspectives and positions in the research process. When speaking for others—we must beware of exploitation and furthering domination of oppressed groups. For in-depth interviewing in particular, researchers should look carefully at the *impetus to speak* (Alcoff, 1995) and the *impetus not to speak* (Scharff, 2010) in order to avoid 1) further silencing oppressed groups, 2) positioning oneself as an authority on a subject (such as gender or wilderness for example), and 3) dismissing the influences and meanings of pauses and silences by both researcher and researched. Scharff (2010) points out that looking at these ‘silencing practices’ addresses important ethical considerations about ‘full consent’, ‘having a proper

dialogue’, or ‘taking seriously the voices of others’; all of which are important parts of *reflexive* analysis (Scharff, 2010).

For this project, in-depth interviewing also supports dialogue *with* silenced subjects (members of an oppressed minority) and *about* silenced subject matter such as gender, sexuality, discrimination, and oppression. By silenced—I don’t mean to imply that participants don’t have a voice—but that people who live in the margins are often excluded from knowledge construction (think about what we learn in history class for example) and from full citizenship (rights vs. responsibilities). Part of this project aims to document those voices who have been silenced in the past and to provide *alternative narrative* accounts of the ‘female’ wilderness recreationist. Additionally, several interviewees voiced their appreciation after the interview, commenting that it had been nice to talk about and work through such topics. Truly, not all interviewees experienced *empowerment* through this research, but in-depth interviews do have potential therapeutic value; part of that value stems from validation, consciousness-raising, humor, and shared experiences. For example, Sophia-Margeaux writes in a follow-up letter about discussing gender:

“Thanks again for your time and interest. I’ve never had anyone with whom I could talk to or discuss such matters as gender identity as even the transvestites at the occasional meeting I’ve attended in years past haven’t much of any clue about gender, its sociology and consequences” (Sophia-Margeaux, 2010).

Similarly, Margret shares at the closing of our interview:

“It was actually—it was kind of nice I think that the—I’m glad that we did this interview . . . because it helped me think through some things that have been kinda on my mind recently. Like I had this—like when I was talking about when I express one part of my gender like a lot and kind of craving the other one” (Margret, 2010).

Sage also expresses her appreciation and interests in the insights gained from the study. She says,

“And I appreciate the fact that you’re doing the exploration . . . I mean ‘cause I think these are topics that I’m always thinking about, too. About you know gender. And I hadn’t

made the connection between gender and wilderness and embodiment—so I'm very curious about that. But each one of those pieces is something that I've given a lot of thought to” (Sage, 2010).

As mentioned earlier, respectful and ethical interviewers are also not afraid to divulge personal information. It's about giving a little rather than just taking a lot. This does not mean, however, that interviewers take the spotlight and dominate the entire conversation with their stories. Doing this would not only be rude and disrespectful, but it would also leave the researcher with little more than a personal memoir. Sharing information is about sharing experience and validation of those experiences—it's about sharing joy and humor in the things we love while also sharing frustration and anger in the face of opposition. These exchanges build trust and rapport which are arguably what it takes to gather rich data in an honest and ethical way. Still though, interviewers should use discretion about what stories they are telling and when they are telling them. Interviewers should, for instance, be careful 1) not to interrupt interviewees; 2) not to make the interviewee feel uncomfortable; 3) not to make them feel like their stories are inadequate or less-important; and 4) not to imply that you 'know what they are saying' or that your experiences in this world are the same. The following exchange between me (Angie) and Beatrice reveals one example of how I approach sharing information in interviews and what type of exchanges can ensue. Beatrice had voiced some issues related to vulnerability and the sexualization of female breasts—after which she talked a bit about transitioning. I kept that seed in my mind, wrote it in my notebook, and when she had finished talking and then voiced she thought she had gotten off topic—I came back around to the previous topic to share a story that I thought she might relate to.

Beatrice: I used to love skinny dipping. I had no problem skinny dipping. I did it all the time. And now it's partial skinny dipping. You know I have no problem taking the top off. It's a little—it's a little weird. After a year and a half of transition—for me to take a top off at a pool or a lake it's like wow—I kinda feel vulnerable. Whereas I always used to

swim topless prior to transition. I never wore a top—ever. And suddenly I have this vulnerability when I'm topless. It's just like—oh—this is kind of interesting.

Angie: Yeah. Where do you think it comes from?

Beatrice: Well I think part of its society's um construct of breast—they're this forbidden thing that aren't supposed to be shown. They're supposed to be hidden and, and I've kind of accepted that. Um. I've—and it's interesting. I'm getting a lot better at that I mean I gone over to a couple of friends topless party or gone out with friends. Or you know when I'm in my room—I'm completely topless 98% of the time. 'Cause I have this love/hate relationships with bras. They do amazing things for my breasts but at the same time I hate how they feel.

Angie: Yeah. Sometimes . . . yeah.

Beatrice: So—I love 'em but I f*&%ing hate them . . . (brief discussion on transitioning) . . . Jesus Christ I am good at getting off topic.

Angie: No—you're not off topic. I was thinking about the breast thing because I—just how breast are so sexualized 'cause . . .

Beatrice: They really are

Angie: An example—I was at the ***** Center playing basketball and you know you're not allowed to go topless anywhere in the gym except if you're playing basketball and you're playing shirts and skins. Okay. Cool. I'm on the skins team. I have a sports bra on. I can take off my shirt. The manager of the ***** Center or whatever the hell that's called—the gym—comes up to me and tells me I need to put my shirt back on. And I'm like, well....why

Beatrice: What the f...

Angie: I know. I've been thinking over the past year how I'm gonna address it. 'Cause I was like, what do you mean I have to put my shirt on? This is shirts and skins. And he really didn't have an answer. I was like, okay—he didn't get it. I was like first you're assuming I identify as female. Second, you're like sexualizing women. I mean does it mean just 'cause dudes have their shirts off that people aren't attracted to their chest. You know what I'm saying?

Beatrice: Yeah totally. I completely understand.

Angie: And I was just infuriated. I was like, you . . .

Beatrice: That's something—since I started working out at the gym—totally I've really been tempted to be like okay I'm just gonna wear a sports bra.

Angie: Yeah—they'll be like put your shirt back on.

Beatrice: I f*&%ing, I f*&%ing—I love my breasts Men can show off their bodies as much as they want. And it's really kind of f*&%ed. It's really f*&%ed. It's like well okay—technically if you want to get nitty gritty about it—I can technically go freaking topless 'cause it doesn't matter what the hell my driver's license says or what it says that I'm enrolled as—the state of ***** still sees me as a male Not that I would ever do that because I think that would be—probably 'cause a negative stigma for the community. And it's not really part of my identity. But at the same time—there's times I'm really tempted to do it 'cause it's like okay see this—see what's on my chest—guess what—it used to be that. It was just a couple of pills that changed it okay so really it's the same damn thing Yeah and that's an interesting struggle with the university in itself. It's really good to know though 'cause I'm having some issues with the campus right now that I'm working through with the ***** Equality Project. And that leads into a really interesting situation like what exactly are they going to allow trans-men to show. You know I know a couple of trans-guys that are pretty much flat. And they go around topless. They don't care. They don't care what people think. Which is in my opinion an unbelievable achievement to be able to be that comfortable with your body is just—I can't even imagine being that comfortable. But you know that brings in this whole situation of how does society see that person. That person has breasts but facial hair. Do they see them as a male? Or do they see them as a female? You know they still see them as a female despite the fact that they're ripped and they've gotta full beard and whatever. If they still have breasts, they're still a female.

Angie: Yeah

Beatrice: It's like—no. No.

Angie: There's not really room for a transitory...

Beatrice: Yeah. That's the same thing with me. I've still got a penis.

Angie: Right

Beatrice: And it definitely proves to be um a little awkward at times. You know—one of the hardest things—I still to this day no matter how much I try to be comfortable. I still to this day get pissed off at the fact that I'm literally so uncomfortable when I go into—like when I go into a locker room. I let this godamn thing between my legs limit my happiness and comfortability.

I share this excerpt to be transparent about my process and my methods. But I also share this with the hope that readers can observe how sharing personal stories might build solidarity, trust, and rapport while also drawing out rich and meaningful dialogue about research topics.

Indeed, qualitative researchers must develop ‘*sensitivity*’ both during data collection and data analysis—as analysis begins as soon as interviewing begins. Sensitivity is the “ability to pick up on subtle nuances and cues in the data that infer or point to meaning” (Corbin and Strauss, 2008: 19). During the interview, for instance, researchers must become adept at active listening, note-taking for future probes, exploring new dimensions of concepts in the data, and keeping the interview flexible *and* directed. To cultivate sensitivity, researchers must immerse themselves in the data and be able to hear what respondents are saying and present the point of view of the ‘other’. In responding to interviewees, the researcher also brings his or her knowledge and experience into the conversation. Although I did my best not to influence interviewee responses with ‘leading’ questions—the semi-structured interview is much like a conversation and the “interview is shaped both in its construction and meaning through the questions that are asked, the pauses, facial expressions, and other verbal and nonverbal communications that occur between the respective parties” (Corbin and Strauss, 2008:28).

In-depth/semi-structured interviews are also particularly valuable for *grounded theory* analysis which uses rich descriptive stories to build substantive theory based on open coding. Grounded theory was first developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) for the purpose of building theory from data and has been implemented by many feminist qualitative researchers from diverse disciplinary fields (Clarke, 2005, 2007). Grounded theory has always had post-modern and feminist potential because it is perspective oriented and thereby recognizes situated knowledge(s) and is committed to presenting the emic perspective (Haraway, 1991, 1997; Clark, 2007). The methodology, however, is rooted in symbolic interactionism and pragmatist philosophy and has been criticized for its oversimplifications, lack of reflexivity, singular basic social process, use of ‘negative cases’, and the search for ‘purity’ (Clarke, 2007: 349). Like other

researchers who use grounded theory (Corbin and Strauss 2008, Charmaz 2000, Locke 2001, Clarke 2007), my research departs somewhat from traditional grounded theory in that I take a more feminist and constructionist approach (i.e. a single shared reality does not exist). I do not, for example, seek to build formal theory (i.e. Truth) or expel or label ‘negative cases’ in theory building. I also incorporate explicitly reflexive methodological practices and move away a bit from traditional grounded theory in that I don’t follow methodological prescriptions exactly like a recipe book and I don’t focus as much on dynamics of social interactions.

Grounded theory analysis was chosen for this research to 1) identify overarching themes in the data (for nomothetic analysis), 2) build theory and knowledge from lived experiences, and 3) expand the limited theoretical and empirical knowledge about how people experience gender and body in wilderness settings. In-depth/semi-structured interviewing is ideal for these purposes because the technique uses open-ended questioning that captures *lived experiences* and therefore allows theoretical concepts and categories to *emerge* from qualitative data analysis. Grounded theory also provides accessible and effective methodological tools and techniques.

Role of the researcher

As shown above, part of feminist methodology involves acknowledging how and why researchers influence what and who they study and recognizing that we are part of the story and the research process. Qualitative researchers should not be afraid to acknowledge their subjective perspective as this is part of developing *sensitivity* and *reflexivity*. In fact, “the more we are aware of the subjectivity involved in data-analysis, the more likely we are to see how we are influencing interpretations” (Corbin and Strauss, 2008: 33). For instance,

“When we speak about what we bring to the research process we are not talking about forcing our ideas on the data. Rather, what we are saying is that our backgrounds and past experiences provide the mental capacity to respond to and receive the messages contained in data—all the while keeping in mind that our findings are a product of data *plus* what the researcher brings to the analysis” (Corbin and Strauss, 2008: 33).

In striving for transparency, I have provided access to 1) the interview guide; 2) my responses and/or questions with interviewee quotes; 3) examples of how I’ve shared personal information; 4) a sample theoretical sampling recruitment email; and 5) a transcribed interview (with permission, see appendix). My intentions here are to help readers be able to make independent judgments on how the researcher may have affected and interpreted the responses of the interviewees. In addition, I’ve provided a brief positionality statement (see below) which acknowledges my position(s) within the social matrix of power and privilege. Although ‘my voice’ runs throughout this thesis, the following positionality statement is frank and more deliberate. “This positioning”, for instance, “means acknowledging values and ideological positions” and I do believe that:

“Authors who reveal their starting points and standpoints—and concerns and commitments—permit readers to assess both their approach and the quality of their content. An articulated position then becomes an anchor point for the observations and interpretations that follow. Readers can then place the narrative into perspective and delineate the boundaries of generalizations within it” (Charmaz, 2007: 445).

Positionality is nebulous and sticky yet necessary to inform a *reflective and critical* feminist perspective because examining privilege and disempowerment are fundamental steps in social science research. It is the ultimate transparency—letting your reader know where you come from and why you might, in a research design and process, choose certain paths, decisions, or perspectives over others. Furthermore, although “knowing that the author held a personal stake in the topic once marked research as biased. Increasingly, however, readers see a personal stake as a mark of authorial credibility rather than bias” (Charmaz, 2007: 446). More than that,

including authorial voice and articulating some type of positionality statement helps to make researchers ‘real’ people rather than disconnected information regurgitators. As Charmaz (2007) points out, “Increasingly, we [feminists] appear in our texts as thinking, acting—and feeling—participants rather than as disembodied reporters of collected facts” (443). Overall, I include this statement as a reflective exercise and to expose the perspectives, practices, performances, and social positions that I embody.

“When we write about the experiences of a group to which we do not belong, we should think about the ethics of our action, considering whether or not our work will be used to reinforce and perpetuate domination” ~ bell hooks 1989: 43

I am both privileged and disempowered. I am a faggot who is also white. I am a queer middle-class American. I am a biological female with a transgendered personality who is also an incest survivor. Although I was raised traditional southern Baptist, I presently follow no faith in particular. I reject the notions that femininity necessitates a constant pampering and disfiguring of the body. I love gender-bending. I love resisting through subtle acts of defiance. I am a human animal and I choose not to eat meat unless I kill, butcher, and cook the animal (which I’ve never done but will do, maybe). I am a teacher and a student and quite often I am nervous and shy. I was raised in both rural and suburban settings by an Appalachian mother and a Mexican stepfather. I am a feminist, dyke, wilderness lover who enjoys physical activity such as hiking, backpacking, boating, and dancing—which in many ways informs and shapes the way I approach this project. I am an able-bodied, college-educated white American—which in many ways informs and shapes the way I approach this project.

When I reflect on and write about these social positions—I think it’s important to note that I find it a more difficult task to pick apart and express my privileged positions than those which I feel dis-empower me. On one hand, I feel more attached and justified when I write about

my struggles as if they are more a part of my identity. On the other hand, I sometimes feel as if my account of my privileged position is inadequate and inherently biased or tainted. How can I ever intimately know how I am privileged from my privileged perspective? I am still not sure. Nonetheless, I think examining our positionality does expose our comfort levels and helps us question the subjectivity of our perspectives in research and in everyday life. For me, a big part of methodological process in social research is about looking critically at how these social positions affect my research decisions, analytic interpretations, inter-personal communications, and presentations of my findings.

Interview process:

In order to best understand and explore human perceptions and experiences in wilderness I chose a methodological approach that allows the data to emerge from interview processes. Over the past thirty years, researchers have engaged in four main types of approaches to measuring wilderness experiences: satisfaction approaches, benefits-based approaches, experience-based approaches, and meaning-based approaches (Borrie and Birzell, 2001). Although not yet widely accepted, for this research I chose to take a meaning-based approach to studying wilderness experiences because I believe this approach captures the quality of the experience.

“Understanding the multiple meanings that people have for wilderness” for example, “can help us identify the activities, benefits, and experiences that managers should aim to provide” (Borrie and Birzell, 2001: 8). Within this approach, in-depth interviewing is one of the best ways to understand the multiple meanings of wilderness experiences.

The purpose of the interviews was to uncover how participants experienced their genders and their bodies in wild land settings. All interviews were in-depth and semi-structured and

during all interviews the researcher 1) used an interview guide to help keep the interview directed toward the particular research topics and 2) encouraged all participants to expound on their experiences, feelings, or perceptions thought to be related to the research topics ('thought to be' by either interviewer or interviewee). While interviewing, I found the best way to get rich descriptions was listening to wilderness stories and using 'probes' to gather further details or relevant themes that emerge through these stories. Probes are follow-up questions that occur throughout the interview in order to gain clarity and nuanced understanding (Gray et. al, 2007). The retelling of a story, for instance, captures context, temporality, and emotion; these are things we cannot so easily separate from the story. It is evidence for the way in which people make sense of their lives—through story and narrative. It is also evidence for one of the best ways to obtain thick descriptions about a research topic.

My interview questions (see Table 1: interview guide) focused on gbtq perceptions, experiences, and meanings of gender and body in wilderness settings. Although this general focus was consistent across interviews, the interview guide is as much a process as it is an end product (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). The example interview guide in table one is one of the more recent drafts of the guide but still represents the questions and probes asked during the interviews. For example, along the way I made edits such as adding specific probes concerning emerging themes, rewording ambiguous and technical jargon, and removing problematic or unsuccessful questions (i.e. irrelevant, difficult to answer, or convoluted). Moreover, each interview took its own course as the sequence and time spent on each question varied across the interviews. Some participants, for example, only needed one question to tell a story that both answered that question (including probes) and maybe several other questions. Others, however, provided shorter answers that required the researcher to probe more frequently for clarification

or to get at deeper meanings. Overall, the researcher tried to strike a balance between keeping the interview directed while also letting the data emerge from the interviewees and the stories that they wanted to tell.

Before each interview, participants were given two documents: a brief explanation of the research and subject information and consent form (see appendix). Both documents were approved by the University of Montana Institutional Review Board (IRB) and were delivered to interviewees via email or USPS ground mail. Initial correspondence through email with interviewees also included my full disclosure as a queer person and my availability to answer any questions they might have concerning the research project. Once interviewees looked over the research documents and agreed to take part in the study, an interview was set up. Consent forms were signed before the interview—either in person or through email or mail. Interviews took place either in the home of the interviewer (1), the home of the interviewee (6), a quiet study or conference room on campus (6), or over the telephone (7). All interviews were audio-recorded and ranged from thirty-nine minutes to ninety-four minutes with the average duration lasting fifty-eight minutes.

Overall, opening questions were broad in scope while probes were 1) more specific to gendered and bodily experiences and 2) more sensitive to the interviewee responses. Questions on wilderness (#1, #2, & #4) were designed to let the interviewee define and give meaning to wild places on their own terms. Open-ended questions about wilderness experiences (#3) were designed to facilitate story-telling of either *recent* and/or *memorable* wilderness trips. I asked for both recent and/or memorable because of the role proximity (time) plays in data collection. On the one hand, close proximity is paramount for capturing raw experiential data; the more proximate, for example, the more the wilderness experiences are fresh, vivid, and central to

‘being’ at that moment. As time passes, for instance, people usually begin to filter and situate their experiences within their life-worlds. Newberry points out, for example,

“The limitation of accounts of experience is that they can become a sort of fishbowl, from which an essential subject narrates a coherent story, unable to view that story from beyond the confines of the bowl. Experiences are never transparent, but are constructed, read, and understood through sets of social meanings. What we remember and what we tell has everything to do with a particular vision of the self and of the world that we wish to put forth, and with what knowledges we can allow ourselves to know” (2003: 209).

The accessibility, however, of proximate bodily and lived experiences is not so easily attained and the logistics required to do so were outside the scope of this project. Surely, however, there is value in the recollection of wilderness experiences—especially those that are memorable and life-changing. Indeed, gender is both lived and reflected and capturing this reflection over time is beneficial for understanding how interviewees 1) bestow meaning to their wilderness experiences over time and 2) situate themselves physically and socially over time.

Question five was originally intended to draw out bodily experiences with wilderness descriptors such as wild, raw, and untamed. Several interviewees pointed out, however, that these descriptors seemed like an archetypal masculine way to approach wilderness; after which I began to explore the gendered nature of this language through the use of follow-up probes. Additionally, I asked several identity questions (#6 & #7); ultimately, these questions asked individuals to think about how they view themselves and how they perceive others view them. These questions were designed to capture context and process and find out how participants locate themselves within micro conditions (closer to the individual) and macro conditions (those more distant to the individual like social or political conditions). We might see, for instance, how participants frame their gender identities within different cultural and sub-cultural contexts. Question eight developed into a comparison question between gender in ‘society’ and gender in wilderness settings. With this question, I wanted to get at 1) how wilderness settings are or are

not unique in how gender plays out for participants, 2) what is it about wilderness that allows for their particular gendered experience, and 3) how interviewees feel about their bodies in terms of gender in wilderness. Question nine was also intended to draw out the bodily experiences that are particular to wilderness settings.

Questions ten and eleven were originally designed to explore the connections between resistance, gender, and wilderness. I had proposed, for example, that resistance remained an integral part of queer identity and that wilderness settings offered a way and a place to resist dominant gender norms. After several interviews, however, no strong connections between the two surfaced and the term resistance also seemed problematic as a way to describe interviewee relationships to wild places. Thus, these questions instead developed into an exploration of what resistance means to interviewees; in most cases these questions led to discussions about discrimination and oppression based on gender or sexual orientation. The difficulty in asking directly about resistance in the context of wilderness is a significant finding and the implications of this finding will be explored in the Discussion chapter.

Question twelve was originally designed to get information on what type of activities participants do in wilderness as well as how often they go and how long they stay. After several interviews, I found this question fruitless and deleted the ‘how often’ section and focused on asking about activities in order to spark more wilderness stories around those activities. Perhaps they voiced that they loved water boater, for example, and I would follow-up by asking about a particular water experience or what it was they enjoyed about being in or on the water. This probe was used more frequently if I felt that the interview needed more depth and detail about a person’s wilderness adventures. Additionally, the probes ‘do you go alone or in groups?’ and ‘do you go with same-sex or co-ed groups?’ were designed to understand how other people and

the gender of other people influence a person's wilderness experience. These became particularly important for developing the categories relating to refuge and vulnerability that had surfaced from initial interviews.

The last set of demographic questions (#13-#16) asks participants about their sex, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, and age. Originally, I had asked additional demographic questions including education, employment background, and hometown. After the first three interviews, however, I decided to omit these three demographics because they 1) seemed invasive and disclosed too much information about a person's identity and therefore threatened confidentiality, 2) didn't seem particularly relevant to the topics at hand, and 3) had potential to make participants uncomfortable in the interview setting. Before asking questions thirteen-sixteen, each interviewee was informed that they could elaborate on any of these questions or they could choose not to answer for whatever reason. I wanted to preface these questions with this statement so that interviewees didn't feel like I was trying to put them in a box, and that they had the opportunity to refuse being categorized or to elaborate on the complexity inherent in topics such as race, sex, and sexuality; topics that many people might view as straight forward, cut and dry. Many interviewees chose to elaborate on this section, while no one refused to answer. After I had asked all the questions from the interview guide, I opened up the discussion to give each interviewee the opportunity to voice anything left unsaid. Many used this time to ask about the motivations and progress of the study. Some had nothing to add while others told additional stories they thought might be relevant. Many times, this part of the interview elicited some of the most interesting data and conversations. These conversations were included in the analysis as they were considered part of the audio-recorded interview. Participants were told when the tape-recorder was turned off and this marked the end of the interview and thus the end of usable data

for analysis. Several conversations continued after this, and although received by the author (and thus would not be ignored) they were not formally included in analysis nor presented in the results section.

Table 1: Interview Guide

-
- 1) Could you tell me how you define wilderness? (Use interviewee's wording for interview)
 - 2) Could you tell me what wilderness means to you? Explore.
 - P1: According to response—probe on gender, body, push, pull.
 - P2: Explore spiritual aspects if mentioned.
 - P3: Explore refuge if mentioned.
 - 3) Can you tell me about your most recent wilderness trip? And if there wasn't something recent, maybe one that is memorable for you?
 - P1: What sorts of feelings stand out in your mind from the experience?
 - P2: Could you tell me about the physical or bodily nature of the experience?
 - P3: How significant were sensations like smells, sounds, sights, textures, and tastes?
 - 4) Could you describe what it's like to be physically immersed in wilderness/wildness?
 - 5) Do you feel that wilderness experiences are wild, raw, or untamed?
 - P1: Explore why or why not
 - P2: Explore gendered nature of this language
 - P3: Explore how wilderness experiences help you to connect with your body in these primal ways? Ways perhaps that you felt connected to your own wildness?
 - 6) Do you feel like wilderness is part of your identity?
 - P1: Can you explain how and why these experiences are part of your identity?
 - P2: Explore connections to gender if mentioned.
- (Note to participant: we're going to change direction just a little bit here. Still on identity, but we are going to move into gender. We can still continue to make connections to wilderness throughout.)*
- 7) Could you describe your gender identity to me? Explore where this leads.
 - P1: How do you feel like you express your gender?
 - P2: Explore clothing, behaviors, personality, physicality, career choices if appropriate.
 - 8) Now if we were to take that conversation we just had about gender, gender identity, and gender expression and think about it in a different context—a wilderness context for example. What comes to mind when you think about your gender in a wilderness setting?
 - P1: Do you feel like your body is gendered in wilderness?
 - P2: Do you think about your gender differently when you are in wild places? Why or why not and when?
 - P3: What is it about wild places that allow or support this?
 - P4: Explore influence of other people on how you experience gender in wilderness.
-

Note: "P" denotes the variety of probes used during interviews

Table 1: Interview guide

9) Do you feel that wilderness teaches you anything about your body?

P1: Could you put into words what and how you learn these things?

P2: Why are they important to you?

P3: Do you think wilderness helps you to reconnect with your body? How?

(Note to participant: I want to change directions just a little bit here to explore a particular concept)

10) Can you think of any instances where you chose not to comply with or have actively gone against the dominant rules and views of this society? Explore.

P1: I think of this as another way of saying ‘resistance’ but this hasn’t resonated with everyone so I want to understand what this term means for you. Does this term seem appropriate for the instances you just described? Explore resistance for participant.

P2: Can you think of any examples of how you might have used your body to resist these dominant views?

P3: How important is this resistance to your identity?

11) Do you feel that you go to wilderness, for instance, to resist anything that society will not let you do or will not let you be? Explore depending on previous responses.

P1: Is there a particular bodily experience that you’re fleeing from?

P2: Is there a particular gendered experience that you’re fleeing from?

P3: Is there a particular bodily experience that you’re fleeing to?

P4: Is there a particular gendered experience that you’re fleeing to?

12) Could you tell me about how often you visit wilderness? [Use this to get stories if haven’t already]

P1: What types of activities/things do you do there?

P2: Do you go alone or in groups (same-sex or co-ed)?

(Note to interviewee: The remaining questions are demographic questions. If you want to elaborate on any—feel free to, but if you don’t want to answer any of them for whatever reason—that’s perfectly fine, too.)

13) What is your sex? (Or how would you describe your biological sex?)

14) Could you describe your sexual orientation?

15) Could you describe your race/ethnicity?

16) What is your age?

Okay well that’s all the questions I have for you but I generally open it up at the end in case there was anything that you wanted to say that you didn’t get a chance to say. And if there’s not—that’s okay, too. Explore what participants would like to discuss.

Note: “P” denotes the variety of probes used during interviews

Study Participants

Study participants were recruited from a variety of sources including friends and/or acquaintances of the interviewer (4); recommendations from colleagues in the College of Forestry and Conservation (3); recommendations from friends and/or acquaintances of the interviewer (2); responses from internet listservs/websites from gbtq outdoor clubs, women's clubs, and gbtq community organizations (4); and from responses to posters (see appendix) placed at outdoor recreation stores, campus recreation facilities, and GBTLQI organizations (1). By using a snowball technique, I was able to enlarge the sample to include six more interviewees. The interviewer, for example, asked each interviewee to send my contact information along to anyone else who they thought might be interested. When using snowball sampling and/or convenience sampling for qualitative research with small and marginalized populations, one must also be aware of the ethical consequences such as confidentiality and privacy (Horsley and Dyson 2007). In addition to following IRB procedures, my recruitment efforts were also cautious in order to avoid 1) disclosing gender or sexual orientations of potential participants or 2) disclosing participant involvement to other participants. During recruitment, for example, I provided my information via listservs, websites, and posters and waited for responses; and when friends or colleagues made recommendations—I asked them to give my information (and sometimes a copy of the consent form) to potential interviewees. Thus, I waited for interviewees to contact me and once contact was made—I asked the interviewee which method of communication they preferred for exchanging documents and setting up interviews (i.e. telephone, email, or mail).

Participants were recruited based on three loosely defined criteria: 1) identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer, 2) identified at any point in their life as 'female',

and 3) had recreated or worked in wilderness. Limiting the sample in these ways is justifiable because this is an important population worth knowing and understanding. I put the term female in quotes deliberately to acknowledge the diversity of ‘females’ in American culture. A biological male who cross-dresses, for example, might label herself as ‘female’ whereas a biological female who feels more comfortable with a transgender identity may not identify as ‘female’. The point is that the categories ‘woman’ and ‘female’ are transitory, context-dependent, and multiple. Thus, participants who have self-identified as female at any point in their life were recruited for this research. I chose to limit the sample in these ways not because I believe people who fit these three criteria share the same experiences but because I felt they often had unique and diverse experiences and perceptions relating to gender. In particular, those experiences include confronting discrimination and negotiating and navigating gender (and sometimes sex and sexuality) in different sub-cultural contexts.

A total of twenty participants were interviewed for the study. Included in this twenty is one ‘pilot’ interview which was done as a sort of trial run of the interview questions. The ‘pilot test’ process also included feedback from academic peers on both the interview guide and the interview transcription—both of which helped refine and improve the quality and clarity of the questions. The initial pilot interview is included in the results and analysis because the data from this interview played an important role in the development of the interview questions as well as the overarching storyline drawn out by theoretical sampling.

As mentioned earlier, interviewees were asked socio-demographic questions about gender, sex, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, and age. These questions were asked more to elicit discussion rather than to categorize individuals. It is not my intention to draw conclusions and make comparisons based on socio-demographic information, but I do want to provide a brief

description of some of these characteristics. Although socio-demographic diversity was an important goal in sampling—I did not do any screening of participants to facilitate this diversity. Indeed, recruitment of this sub-population was somewhat difficult and just finding twenty people to participate was a feat in itself. I think this recruitment was tough because of the relatively small and hard-to-reach target sampling population (gbtlq) and limitations of theoretical sampling strategies which follow concepts as they develop over time. The following are some of the socio-demographic characteristics either known by the researcher or gathered during the interview and/or recruitment process.

Table 2: Age Range of Interviewees

Age Range	Number of Interviewees
20-29	7
30-39	5
40-49	3
50-49	3
60-69	2

Table two above shows the age ranges of interviewees. The sample also includes a diverse mix of genders, sexes, and sexual orientations (see Table 3). The sample does not, however, include much racial or ethnic diversity. Of the twenty interviewees, eighteen were of European-American heritage and one was of Eurasian and Mediterranean descent. One of those eighteen was also Jewish and several interviewees provided further race/ethnicity information (in addition to white) that can be seen on Table three. Unfortunately, I did not get the race/ethnicity information from one interviewee because I forgot to ask during a phone interview. Of the twenty interviewees, thirteen participants were interviewed and living in Western Montana as this location was the most accessible to the researcher for face-to-face interviews. Of these

thirteen, only two mentioned being from Montana; the other ‘home’ states mentioned were Utah, Kentucky, Idaho, California, and Wyoming. Seven phone interviews were conducted with individuals living in Washington (2), Idaho (1), North Carolina (1), Kentucky (1), California (1), and Nevada (1). Of these seven phone interviews—one mentioned being originally from Montana, one from New York, and one from Iowa. Two women mentioned having children and at least thirteen had no children. No one mentioned having a physical or mental disability beyond long-term or chronic injuries and pain. At least eleven study participants had a college degree at the time of the interview.

Many of the individuals interviewed for this study seemed to have feminist outlooks in the way they responded to questions. Certainly not all, but many also voiced that at some point in their lives they had read feminist literature or had been involved with the feminist movement and or with women’s/queer rights. Granted feminism means different things to different people and those meanings have certainly changed over time. Still though—feminist perspectives are certainly not representative of the broader public. Looking back—although I did not ask if participants were feminists—the word feminist was in the title of the project on the consent form that was signed by all participants. In retrospect, I would have used more discretion in the title of this project to make the study a bit more accessible. In addition, the sample does not include much racial or ethnic diversity—which again is certainly not representative of the broader public and should be taken into consideration when making any generalizations about the results of this study. Most of the participants in this study are white and of western European heritage; the

results of this study therefore may not be representative of wilderness experiences from African American or Native American perspectives, for example⁶.

Sampling Strategy

For this research, I used a *theoretical sampling* strategy which is concept-driven and requires the researcher to allow the analysis to guide the research. Indeed, theoretical sampling is cyclical in that researchers start analysis as soon as data collection begins—which is followed by more data collection and analysis and so on until the researcher believes categories have reached ‘theoretical saturation’ (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). *Theoretical saturation* is “the point in analysis when all categories are well developed in terms of properties, dimensions, and variations. Further data gathering and analysis add little new to the conceptualization, though variations can always be discovered” (Corbin and Strauss, 2008: 263). In essence, the researcher is searching for the analytic story-line and must follow the leads that surface through the data. Sometimes it means letting go of initial proposal ideas (such as resistance themes in this research) and pursuing the categories that emerge. A researcher can do this throughout data collection and analysis by incorporating probes that are specific to emerging themes and/or knowing where to get data (i.e. who is saying what) that might help further develop the dimensions of a particular concept (such as refuge). To do this, however, requires the researcher

⁶ On issues of American wild land recreation and racial differences see: 1) see Dorceta Taylor (2000). Meeting the Challenge of Wild land Recreation Management: Demographic Shifts and Social Inequality, *Journal of Leisure Research*, Vol. 32, No. 1: 171-179; 2) Derek Martin (2004). Apartheid in the Great Outdoors: American Advertising and the Reproduction of a Racialized Outdoor Leisure Identity, *Journal of Leisure Research*, Vol. 36, No. 4: 513-535; 3) Johnson, C. Y. (1998). A consideration of collective memory in African American attachment to wildland places. *Human Ecology Review*, Volume 5, No. 1: 5-15; and 4) Elizabeth Blum (2002). Power, Danger, and Control: Slave Women’s Perceptions of Wilderness in the Nineteenth Century. *Women Studies*, 31: 247-265.

to transcribe shortly after interviewing and analyze the data ‘as you go’ rather than gathering all the data at once and then analyzing. Doing the latter would not allow the researcher to make adjustments to questions or sampling based on emerging themes.

Although theoretical sampling was used throughout this research, I would like to share one specific example that illustrates how I tried to reach theoretical saturation of the category—wilderness as a refuge from normative gender. This category, for example, surfaced in initial interviews but it wasn’t until late in the analysis that I began to see wilderness as a refuge from normative gender for people who do a lot of gender negotiating in society (mostly people who identified as transgendered). Because I wanted to better understand this category (i.e. expand dimensions and properties)—I sent out several emails to previous participants who I thought could help recruit additional interviewees (see appendix) to discuss this topic. Although I was only able to find one additional interviewee (mostly because of time constraints)—the interview proved to be invaluable in that it shed light on the variation within the category. During this interview—I used the same interview guide but I also included additional probing near the end concerning the refuge category. The interview revealed important insights not previously present in the data sample. For example, our discussion revealed how and why the concept of refuge might be problematic in terms its valuation of wild vs. non-wild and how the concept of un-patrolled or un-patrollable might be at the root of what refuge really means.

Data Collection and Analysis

Interviews were conducted during the months of December 2009 (1 pilot), January 2010 (6), February 2010 (12), and April 2010 (1). Interview locations were chosen depending on

where the interviewee felt most comfortable. With permission of each interviewee, all interviews were audio-recorded using an Olympus digital voice recorder WS-400S and were then transcribed using the software Express Scribe. All interviews and transcriptions were done by the primary researcher. In addition to the twenty interviews, three follow-up letters (from one interviewee) were transcribed and used in data analysis. On the one hand, doing all the interviews and transcriptions myself took a tremendous amount of time and energy. For every hour of audio-recorded interviewing, I spent around 2-5 hours transcribing—indeed, so much time at the computer can be mentally and physically exhausting. On a positive note, however, spending all this time interviewing and transcribing allowed me to become more familiar and immersed in the data and lessened the chances of confidentiality breaches.

Analysis was both descriptive and theoretical. “Theory-building”, for example, “is a process of going from raw data, thinking about that raw data, delineating concepts to stand for raw data, then making statements of relationships about those concepts linking them all together into a theoretical whole, and at every step along the way recording analysis in memos” (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). For this research, analysis was indeed a cyclical process alternating between interviewing, transcribing, note-taking, coding, digesting, and integrating.

Analysis started with the interview conversation in which I took notes and probed for clarifications on ambiguous statements. During interviews I often presented interpretations of interviewee statements and asked for validation, variation, or clarification. After the interview, I listened to the audio-recording of each interview, transcribed each interview, and then read each transcription; during each phase I took rigorous notes in a field notebook. This notebook also included notes from scholarly meetings with advisors and colleagues about the research as well as other methodological, theoretical, and analytical notes taken throughout the process. All of the

information from my field notebook was transferred into memos which were stored in MAXQDA—a qualitative data analysis software. “Memos” for example, “are the running logs of analytic thinking. They are the storehouse of ideas generated through interaction with the data” and computer programs that offer retrieval and organizing functions of these memos were invaluable to my research process (Corbin and Strauss, 2008: 108). More will be said below on the use of this software but it’s important to note here that the memo organizing system of MAXQDA allows a researcher to attach memos to particular texts (interviews) or to particular codes and categories; the system also allows the researcher to store 'free memos' which are not attached to text or codes but are helpful in documenting the analytical or methodological process. Also very useful is that MAXQDA allows you to differentiate and retrieve memos by type (some examples: thematic memo, methodological memo, question memo, exclamation memo).

During the initial phases of analysis, I used this memo system to attach memos to pieces of interview texts; these initial memos reflected what I thought were the emerging themes in the data. These thematic memos would eventually be the analytic seeds for the coding system that would develop over the course of the analysis. As I transcribed and read interviews—I began checking the data against these initial memo-codes and thus began creating a coding system based on emerging themes that were rooted in in-vivo codes. Emerging themes were sometimes based on frequency (number of times mentioned by interviewee or across sample), but many responses became themes because they were central to the interviewee’s experience and/or meaning of the experience (Freysinger, 1995). All interview transcriptions were read multiple times to identify these possible meanings and codes until I had come up with a flexible coding system that I felt reflected these meanings. In MAXQDA, the researcher has complete control of the coding and organizing system and it allows for the researcher to re-arrange and reorganize

concepts as the analysis develops. To facilitate analysis, the researcher implemented strategies or analytical tools such as asking questions (for example: so what? Or what if?); making theoretical comparisons (comparing categories); making constant comparisons (comparing pieces of data); coding and using in-vivo codes, drawing upon personal experience (confronting assumptions or presenting a ‘negative case’), looking at various meanings of a word (for example: wild, raw, untamed, refuge, gender), and looking at emotions (Corbin and Strauss, 2008).

After deciding on a flexible coding system and after all interviews had been transcribed—I decided to take a step back and absorb and digest the data. My next step was re-reading all interviews straight through—like a novel and without taking many notes. After this—I refined my coding system by looking for gaps in logic and repetitive or unsupported themes. Indeed, coding is flexible and is just one part of the analytic process—it is a method of deriving and developing concepts in the data (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Part of moving forward with the coding system required that these concepts or *categories* (higher-level concepts) were fully developed in terms of their dimensions and properties. *Properties* are characteristics that define and describe concepts (Corbin and Strauss, 2008: 159). *Dimensions* are variations within properties that give specificity and range to concepts (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, 159). After I felt confident with this coding system, I then coded the first ten interviews. Before moving on, I again took a thoughtful step back and went through each of the ten interviews to make sure the codes I had assigned were consistent and nuanced. I again did some re-working of the coding system and moved on to coding the next ten interviews. During these later coding stages, the researcher began relating and comparing concepts to one another (axial coding and comparative analysis) to help achieve conceptual saturation and work toward integration (Corbin and Strauss, 2008: 195).

The next phase of analysis was a tough one because researchers must find a way to bring everything together as an integrated whole; they must move beyond codes and descriptions in order to build theory. Integration required I find the core category that links all other categories into a cohesive story. To achieve final integration I did a lot of thinking. Indeed, you cannot force understanding and sometimes researchers must accept that it takes time and that those ‘ah-ha’ moments will eventually come. To help with integration—I first looked at context and process to help stimulate a broader look at the data. *Context* can be defined as “set of conditions that give rise to problems/circumstances to which individuals respond by means of action/interaction/emotion. Context arises out of sets of conditions ranging from the most macro to the micro” (Corbin and Strauss, 2008: 229). To look at context—I used an analytic device that Corbin and Strauss (2008) call the *conditional/consequential matrix* which basically involves thinking about the ‘the wide range of possible conditions and consequences that can enter into context’ (229). I asked myself, for example, what are the conditions that respondents are immersed in? (Examples: oppressive and rigid gender systems that can result in discrimination, negotiation, and alienation; wilderness settings that are close to natural processes and unpatrollable.) I asked, what are the historical/political/social factors that led to these conditions? (Examples: media, historical/social/political movements such as women’s liberation, feminist movements, civil rights, gay rights, transgender/transsexual equality; legal designation of wilderness, American-frontier history and culture of wilderness, preconceived notions of masculinity and/or female empowerment). In turn, I asked how interviewees might respond in terms of action/reaction/emotion and whether these were strategic, routine, random, novel, automatic, or thoughtful (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). (Examples: protesting, resistance, feelings of powerlessness to change system, anger, internalization of negative stereotypes, mental

unrest/anxiety, depression, alienation, moral damage, renegade spirit, seeking connection, escape).

The next step was incorporating process and proceeding to final integration. To do this I re-read and sorted all my memos from previous analysis. I then went to the drawing board and made a number of integrative diagrams to help me sort out the relationships between categories. This step proved helpful because it allowed me to 1) look at logic visually and 2) work with abstract and higher-order concepts instead of small details (Corbin and Strauss, 2008: 107). I then began writing summary memos for each of the main categories as well as an overarching storyline that integrates these categories. During this time I was able to find and fill-in missing pieces (dimensions and properties) in the story by going back to the data and coded text segments and re-checking my conclusions. It was through this writing and diagramming process that the core category emerged—sense of belonging. The core category represents the first stage in final integration and choosing a core category meant choosing an abstract concept that had analytical power; this category must appear frequently in the data, be related to all other concepts, and have potential for theory-building (Corbin and Strauss, 2008: 104-105). The core category represents the central message of the analysis. My efforts here in these final phases of analysis entailed searching for a way to explain rather than just describe this analytical story. Although I feel confident in this analysis—choosing this core category required I trust in myself and that the time and thoughtfulness put into this study was enough to make that analytical leap. Final integration occurred while writing up the results; here I began linking other main categories around the core category and filing in details from summary memos. Part of this process involved choosing which parts of the story to tell and how to best organize and present them in

written form. Part of the analysis thus occurred during the several weeks I spent writing, editing, and reworking the analysis into a logical and coherent message.

The following results chapter is an in-depth examination and summary of that analytical story and the data as they relate to guiding questions about how interviewees experience gender and body in wilderness settings. The structure of the results section is quite deliberate in that it reflects part of the analytic process (examination and summary) and is organized around the main categories that surfaced in the data.

CHAPTER 4—RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

This results section is an in-depth and comprehensive explanation of the connections between body, gender, and wilderness. Past research on gender and wild places has focused mostly on women and empowerment (Angell 1994; Bialeschki & Henderson 1993; Kohn 1991; Mitten 1994; Powch 1994; Pohl, Borrie, and Patterson, 2000; Hart & Silka 1994; Stopha 1994; Yerkes and Miranda 1982). Although these studies are invaluable for understanding gender in wild places, little has been done to 1) problematize gender, 2) look specifically beyond the male/female heterosexual master narrative, or 3) examine the intersections between the body and gender in wild places (exceptions: McDermott 2000a; Newberry 2003; Chisholm 2009). A nuanced account of gender in wilderness settings helps promote gender-awareness and shed light on how socially oppressed groups experience wild places. This is valuable information for wilderness managers who should be aware of the diversity of individuals who recreate and work in wilderness and surrounding wild lands.

What started as an exploration of gender and the body became an analytical story about connection, refuge, and belonging. Contained within this story are valuable gaps in our knowledge about gender and wilderness which include:

- ❖ How transgendered, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and/or queer peoples describe their wilderness experiences;
- ❖ an examination of the intersections between the body and gender in wild places;
- ❖ and an in-depth description and examination of how and why participants experience ecological and social belonging in wild places.

It should be noted, however, that many of the comments and excerpts stated in this chapter are not particularly unique to the gbtq experience of wild places. Indeed, many of the responses are

reflective of wilderness experiences across the general population. There are degrees to which we can claim different types of experiences for different types of people and it may be that these experiences of refuge, connection, and belonging are particularly acute for some gbtq people. For instance, while many of us may experience wilderness as an escape—there are different parts of society (or ourselves) that we may wish to escape or seek refuge from, particularly as it relates to power and gender oppression. It is in these differences that a unique gbtq experience of wilderness may surface. As will be discussed below, experiencing wilderness as refuge from normative gender may be one such experience that is particularly pertinent for gbtq (or more specifically transgendered) persons.

Evaluative criteria and levels of analysis

These results represent only one analytical story line; these interpretive results, for example, do not reflect *the only* story line that surfaces in the data. A different researcher may have perhaps chosen a different story to tell. Whether this story is the correct one or the right one is not, however, the point of interpretive research. What makes this story-line and these analyses valuable is not measured by standard quantitative research criteria such as validity, truth, reliability, and generalizability. What makes this qualitative analysis valuable includes different criteria: credibility, resonance, usefulness, and originality (Charmaz 2006) as well as quality (Corbin and Strauss 2008).

Moreover, every theme that emerged through these rich and detailed stories cannot possibly be presented and contained within the narrow scope of this project. Because the focus of this research centers on gender, body, and wilderness, other stories and themes emerged that

cannot be included in these results. In terms of gender and the body, however, nearly all the themes in the data are presented in this results section. Also, these results are based on the level of *the concept* rather than the individual and therefore represent overarching themes across the sample (nomothetic) rather than depictions of individual interviews (idiographic). This analysis is both descriptive (narrative) and theoretical (theory building). Both types of analysis will be intertwined throughout this results section with the more overarching theoretical claims (hypotheses) falling at the closing of this chapter as conclusions. These conclusions/hypotheses are supported and explained throughout the results section with data and analysis.

Interviewee Pseudonyms

This results section includes extensive use of quotes from the interviews to support the researcher's analysis and subsequent theory-building. Indeed, all results come directly from interview analysis. All interviewees therefore either chose or were given pseudonyms to insure confidentiality. The following table (Table 3) is a list of pseudonyms, ages, gender identities, races/ethnicities, sexes, and sexual orientations for those individuals interviewed for this research. In an attempt to represent the interviewee perspectives as honestly as possible—this table reflects the direct responses from interviewees to these demographic questions. I've included this table because it's the most effective way to present this information about study participants; the table is intended to be descriptive but not binding. In other words, readers should not view these labels and categories as finite or resolute as the majority of participants do not view them as such. Moreover, I have included particularly lengthy quotes in this section from participant responses as well as several of my probes (denoted with "I" for Interviewer) in

an effort to maintain context, clarity, transparency, and connections between themes. Indeed, some quotes and points cannot be separated from the rich stories from which they surfaced.

Table 3: Study Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Gender Identities	Race/ethnicity	Sex	Sexual Orientation
Pintler	47	Woman born woman	White and Jewish	Female born female	Queer/lesbian
Lee	31	Woman	Heinz 57	Female	Gay/depends on the day
Sophia-Margeaux	57	Female/transgender	Anglo-European	Male	Queer/heterosexual
Granite	66	Female and lesbian	Caucasian	Female	Lesbian
MSU	31	Man/transgender	White	Male	Big ?/bisexual 'cause it's easier
Dover	60	Androgynous	White/Northern European mixture	Female	Lesbian
Marty	52	Female and lesbian	Caucasian	Female	Lesbian
Sasha	26	Woman	Whitey	Female	Queer
Zara	36	Lesbian and female	Heinz 57	Female	Lesbian
Raven	30	Female	Inbred NW European/White	Female	Gay
Sage	52	Female with flexibility	WASP	Female	Queer
Ouzel	47	Female	Caucasian/Celtic	Female	Lesbian
Patsy	23	Female	White/Mutt/European	Female	Bisexual if I had to pick a box
SC	24	Gay, androgynous, female	Caucasian/American	Female	Lesbian
Eleanor	22	Female	Caucasian	Female	Lesbian
Eva	44	Old fashioned 70's swinger	Eurasian-Asian/Mediterranean	Female	Queer
Beatrice	23	Female first	White/Caucasian/Norwegian	Female first then transsexual	Lesbian primarily/asexual
Margret	26	Female	Polish and White	Female	Bisexual or queer
Sharrel	27	Female/boyish female	Didn't get this information	Female	Bisexual at the moment
July	35	Not fixed	White/Appalachian	Transsexual Male	Queer

Overview of the analytic story

The main category that surfaced through this data is ‘sense of (ecological) belonging in wild places’. I chose this as the core category because of its ‘analytic power’; that is, I chose this category because it integrates all other concepts found in the data and explains, coherently and comprehensively, at least one meaningful analytical story (Corbin and Strauss 2008). Choosing a core category involved moving beyond description and searching for a conceptual idea—something more abstract—which can relate to and hold all other concepts. Additional criteria for choosing this as the core category include: appears frequently in the data (appears in nearly all interviews), logical and consistent with data (not forced), sufficiently abstract so as to be used in theory development in other areas, grows in depth and explanatory power as other relationships between other categories are made (Strauss 1987, p.36; Corbin and Strauss 2008). And finally, I would be remiss to leave out what many researchers might not mention: trust in making analytical leaps. In other words, I had to trust myself, my gut, and my ability to draw out this analytical story after months of living and breathing this data.

The core category is ‘sense of belonging in wild places’. This category represents the overarching wilderness experience for most participants and should be viewed as dynamic and context-dependent (context and process). Under this core category are several other major categories including ‘locating the self’; ‘the wilderness setting’; ‘awakening the body’; ‘feelings of connection’; ‘refuge from normative gender’; and ‘vulnerability’ (See Figure 1). *‘Locating the self’* and *‘the wilderness setting’* are both concept and context. *‘Locating the self’* represents how participants locate themselves in the social matrix of gender in American culture and how these locations influence their experiences in wild places. *‘The wilderness setting’* describes participant definitions and meanings of wild places—the context and place in which ‘sense of

belonging' takes place and what particular characteristics of wilderness facilitate all other major categories. *'Awakening the body'* and *'feelings of connection'* explain part of how and why participants are able to find a sense of belonging in wild places. *'Refuge from normative gender'* explains a nuanced account of 'belonging' by looking at gender in wild places and how and when wilderness offers protection from predatory forces of oppression. *Vulnerability* cross-cuts the latter three categories and is helpful for understanding the tensions between them—namely that people often seek connection, belonging, and refuge in wild places through feelings of vulnerability. This category also explains the differences/variations between vulnerability as a human-animal and vulnerability as a gendered body.

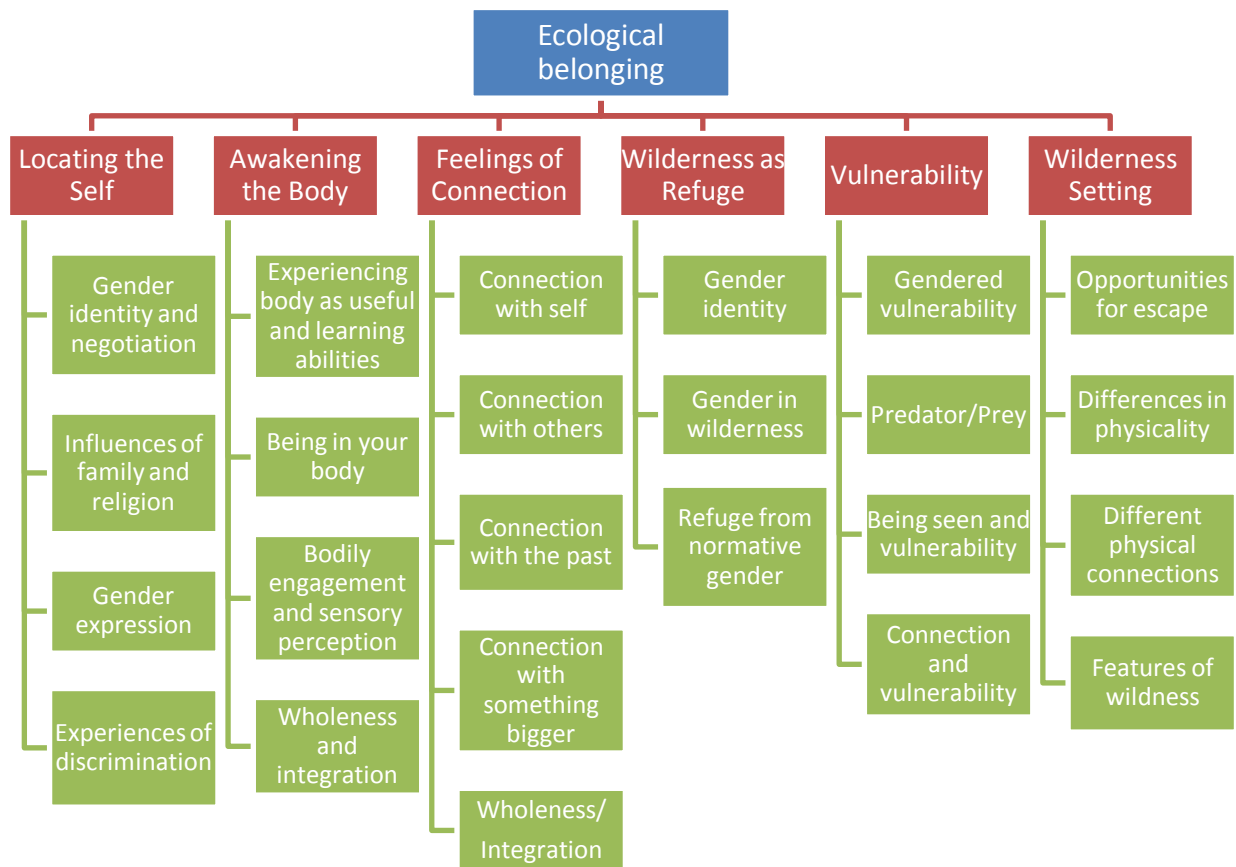


Figure 1: Overview of the Analytic Story

1.0 Locating the Self

‘*Locating the self*’ represents how participants locate themselves in the social matrix of gender in American culture and how these locations influence their experiences in wild places. ‘*Locating the self*’ describes ‘gender identity and negotiation’, ‘experiences of discrimination’, and ‘influences of family and religion’—all of which influence how we experience our gender,

body, and wilderness on-site as well as after we have time to reflect on our experiences and positions within society (see Figure 2). We weave stories about our lives and included in those stories are how our parents, landscape, culture, or events might influence and shape our experiences in wilderness. This is context and process. These things surfaced in the interviews and are particularly important for understanding how and why participants experience wild places as refuge from normative gender and how and why escape is so central to a wilderness experience. Parts of these stories are formed on-site and are rich, detailed, lived. Parts of these stories are told after self-reflection and over time. These stories change as people change and these stories should therefore be viewed as dynamic. Process as well as context then becomes a part of an analytical story (Corbin and Strauss 2008).



Figure 2: Locating the Self

The category ‘locating the self’ does not necessarily reflect the parts of the self that respondents deem most important or influential to neither them nor what I interpreted as such. They are—in part—a reflection of the questions that I asked. They came out of a focus on gender and wilderness. A researcher cannot include every possible influence on a person's life; capturing all the events, people, experiences, changes, and adjustments that take place when people locate their self within society is just not a realistic goal. There are many categories we have to fit or

not fit into and influences that affect our lives. There exist many expectations and roles to fill and we cannot possibly know them all. For the scope of this research—I chose to focus on those influences that surfaced during the interviews and those that relate directly to the line of inquiry concerning gender, body, and wilderness. These ‘locating the self’ influences will be discussed as they relate to each thematic section (main categories) to help explain part of the analytical story (social influences). They are particularly salient for showing how ‘negotiating gender’ and ‘discrimination’ in society constitutes part of the structure, judgment, and surveillance that some participants seek escape and refuge from in wild places. For example, in regards to negotiating gender, Sophia-Margeaux uses the phrase, “I feel like I’m doing gymnastics all the time in my head, with my emotions”. She says further,

“I function as a man mostly out of necessity ‘cause I’m not gonna pass as a woman given my height and how I look (laughs). Within social settings—that’s where wilderness refuge comes in. It allows me to express that other spirit that I feel resides within me. I wonder if it doesn’t reside in all humans . . . you know if I could, I would live my life as . . . a female gendered identified person, but I can’t . . . so I don’t. I’m a pretty practical guy in a lot of ways and I make those concessions . . . wilderness is a place where I can freely express myself without the trouble of others” (Sophia-Margeaux).

‘Locating the self’ then becomes important for understanding how and why a subset of participants experience wilderness as a refuge from normative gender (those who describe consistent gender negotiation in society and/or those who differentiate between sex and gender). Indeed, other aspects of ‘locating the self’ surfaced in the data but none were substantial enough to make clear connections to other categories. There was not enough data, for example, to support the connections between educational or professional influences to any of the major categories. Because there were gaps in the data—I have only included ‘locating the self’ in terms of what the data can support; namely in terms of gender identity, expression, and negotiation.

2.0 The Wilderness Setting

'The wilderness setting' describes participant definitions and meanings of wild places—the context and place in which 'sense of belonging' takes place and what particular characteristics of wilderness facilitate all other major categories. The *'wilderness setting'* is also concept and context in this research; this setting/concept represents the unique locations as described by participants where they are able to find refuge and connection. More than this—the wilderness setting is also a place that offers a certain type of experience. Truly—no two experiences are the same but there do exist some common threads. Understanding the wilderness setting as described in this sample is important for grasping how and why participants experience escape, bodily awakening, ecological connection, and refuge from normative gender in wild places.

Wilderness areas vary by geographical location and the meaning of wilderness varies from person to person. For most participants, the definitions and meanings of wilderness extend far beyond those of legal designations. The terms 'wilderness', 'wild places', and 'wild lands' will therefore be used interchangeably throughout this results section. I asked each participant, for example, to define wilderness on their own terms and to describe what wilderness means to them personally. These questions elicited responses that speak to meaning and experience of wild places as much as they speak to legal boundaries. There are, however, several consistent elements of wilderness that surfaced through the data which are applicable to how interviewees experienced the three findings (categories under core category): feelings of connection, awakening of the body, and wilderness as a refuge from normative gender. Those characteristics (see Figure 3) of wilderness include 1) *the opportunity for escape* (from structure, people, technology); 2) *differences in physicality* (body as useful, self-reliance, challenge, kinesthetic

awareness), 3) *different physical connections* (close to natural processes, sensory perception, animal-self); 4) and *features of wildness* (unpredictability, pristine nature, boundless, exploration, lawless, unpatrollable).

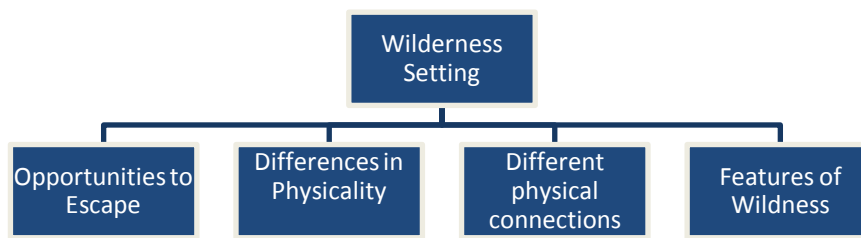


Figure 3: The Wilderness Setting

Other significant characteristics of the wilderness setting mentioned by interviewees include a sense of awe and wonder at natural beauty; a place that is difficult to access, and the presence of viable eco-systems. While these characteristics may appear as undercurrents in the following descriptions, they are not directly addressed as major elements of the wilderness setting in this study. I did not expand upon these characteristics because the data did not strongly support them or their connections with the overarching storyline. The lack of information on these elements of wilderness could be the result of lack of probing on the part of the researcher. They may, however, hold promise for future research on refuge and ecological belonging in wilderness.

"I guess wilderness to me is just like (clears throat-pause)... a wild space... that has no boundaries" ~ SC, 2010

Before I describe each of these four characteristics of wilderness I think it is important to note that doing analysis this way splits wilderness as 'other' to society; we are, for example, setting up a dialectical and dichotomous situation between wild and non-wild, refuge (pull) and escape (push), non-reality and reality. 'Othering' wilderness becomes problematic in the context of mainstream Western culture as the ways of relating to 'others' have been historically founded in suppression, domination, control, oppression, and opposition. "In the case of wildland preservation," exclaims Thomas Birch,

"Bad faith arises when we believe that the simple creation of legal entities such as wilderness areas (a land-use allocation or 'disposition' category) can satisfy the practical necessities of relationship with wild land, and with wildness itself. To create legal entities such as wilderness areas is to attempt to bring the law to wildness, to bring the law to the essence of otherness, to impose civic law on nature" (Birch, 1990).

The question of how clear those boundaries actually are is an important one and one that was explored throughout this research. For instance, when discussing wilderness as a refuge interviewee July explains,

"I mean I try really hard not to think of the natural world in general not as like a refuge which would imply that the city or the urban world is 1) like inherently different somehow and 2) the main thing happening like the main show and like the refuge is like this secondary thing. I try really hard to think about the natural world being the main thing that's happening and not be a refuge or a retreat from something that's like more real" (July, 2010).

Indeed, wildness exists everywhere and part of this wildness exists within ourselves. Delegating wilderness areas, however, does not exterminate wildness. Still, we must continue to ask: to what degree are these boundaries between wild and non-wild arbitrary or fictitious, especially those made by Congress? Part of this questioning is also recognizing the difficulty in words like

‘authentic’ and ‘real’; part of this questioning is acknowledging how we have socially constructed both ‘worlds’ (society and wilderness). July says, for instance,

“I try to even in the places that seem the least wild I try to look for any traces of wildness making its way in, any traces of system breakdown or unpredictability. And that's very important to me—to be able to see those things and remember that they're true all the time . . . Well I like the way that just in my backyard here and all along the train tracks and all along the bridges and shit and down under the ped bridge there near California (street) and just other places around the river—how much wildness there is” (July, 2010).

We must also ask how our relationship to wildness and wilderness might be affected by wildland preserves. When asking July, for example, about the words untamed and raw to describe wilderness, she responds:

“Untamed seems to have that same human/nature problem as if the only way that anything that's not human can have a relationship to the human is to be tamed by us. That kind of bugs me . . . Raw—also seems like it's part of a lot of really problematic discourses around civilization vs. savagery, around like even just around like different poetry movements being condescending to one another. It seems like it assumes another state that is more proper for humans to be in or acting things which is the cooked state or the finished state or whatever while this other thing is the raw state. So I think that both of them have these kind of hidden sides that bug me even though I'm sure I've used both of them a million times to talk about wild places or non-wild places or whatever”(July, 2010).

Additionally, Raven notes “And I guess even like—I don't have to go into designated wilderness to sort of get those things. It really can be going up a draw where there aren't lots of people. So I don't like to limit that sort of capital W wilderness in the whole scale of things” (Raven, 2010).

Indeed, the definitions of wilderness vary across the sample as some make clear distinctions between legally designated wilderness and non-wilderness while others try to break those barriers and look for wildness outside of designated areas, in their everyday lives, and within themselves.

Nevertheless, I believe that across the sample—people do make the distinction between society and wilderness—not based solely on legal designation—but based on *opportunities for escape* (from structure, people/judgment, technology); *differences in physicality* (body as useful, learning abilities, vulnerability, kinesthetic awareness); different *physical connections* (close to natural processes, sensory perception, animal-self, vulnerability); and *features of wildness* (unpredictability, pristine nature, boundless, exploration, unpatrollable, lawless). These distinctions and key features of the wilderness setting are important because they help explain the analytical story: part of where, how, and why participants experience a sense of ecological connectedness, awakening the body, and refuge from normative gender. They are also particularly important as we struggle to understand and preserve the setting in today's society. To some extent they help describe why wilderness is unique, special, and invaluable to participants. Indeed, all four of these characteristics of wilderness are connected to the core category (sense of belonging) and the three main categories that comprise this category.

2.1 Opportunity for escape

“You're on a different level. I mean it's like technology. Almost like you step back in time in like you know 200 years. So it's kind of a time warp. And it's a blessing that you know in today's world that we still have the opportunity to do that. 'Cause I, you know I'm afraid that one point in time maybe down the road that won't be an option for people” ~
Zara, 2010

In everyday use, the word '*escaping*' often carries a negative connotation because of its associations with '*escaping reality*' or '*mental diversions*'. Indeed, many people use entertainment or recreation as a way to '*escape*' what society demands of them in their daily lives. Although when taken to the extreme '*escapism*' can be unhealthy, escaping can also be essential for a person's well-being in our highly technological and urban America. People need respite and

creative outlets in un-structured, un-controlled, and un-patrolled environments as much as they need to re-connect with their animal-selves (part of ecological belonging). 'Escape' from 'society' then is very real to most participants as many live highly structured and controlled lives ('non-wild') in close proximity to other people (judgment, distractions), infrastructure (feelings of being trapped), and technology (comfort, convenience, distraction). Although sometimes easily dismissed, escape and freedom from society are important values of wilderness; values which are far more than just a nice getaway and relaxing weekend. Escaping is one of the most central meanings of wilderness for the individuals in this sample and surfaces in the data through three main outlets: escaping structure, escaping judgment, and escaping technology.

Specifically within the category 'escaping or getting away', we find that people want to get away from 'appearances'; 'expectations/time/structure'; 'comfort and convenience'; 'feelings of being trapped'; 'consumerism'; 'infrastructure and development'; 'technology'; and 'people'. People want to escape control, distraction, monotony and the mundane. Because in wild places there are less distractions—participants are able to experience what it's like to just 'be' in a way that helps people feel 'in their body', 'mindful', or more in-tuned with their surroundings and their inner-self—a type of 'quiet joy' perhaps (Eva, 2010). People want to get away from other people—in terms of proximity of people, overcrowding of people, and type of people. As mentioned earlier, what ultimately ties these sub-concepts together has to do with *structure, judgment, and patrolling*. In wilderness we find the breaking down of social systems, structures, and rules. As Margret (2010) says, "It's in part an escape from society and from you know social definitions or interactions . . . It's this kind of escape but it's also. I guess I go into wilderness because for me it's like a more pure existence and it makes me feel more alive." In wilderness, we are not always so goal driven and we may find that things slow down and thus we find more

time for reflection and relaxation (Granite, 2010). But we also find unpredictability, vulnerability, challenge, and a way to live our life in the moment. Granite, for example, expresses these sentiments associated with escaping distraction and structure and experiencing connection and mindfulness when she says:

"Yeah, routines are part of it but there's so much happening. There's that car and those people. That bright color. I mean you know there's all the visual or auditory distractions. And I think that my mind often is ahead of itself and behind itself and not so much in the moment as it's so easy to do in the wilderness. So that mindfulness is the main deal. And maybe just slowing down and relaxing. I mean there's a certain relaxation that I'm not so goal driven. If I get there I get there. If I don't, I don't . . . You know with that I think there's something about nature that makes me more reflective. There's time to reflect, that feeling of connectedness to everything . . . I guess the main thing it (physical immersion in wildness) would mean to me is that those little thoughts that I often have or going forward-going back thoughts—they would—they disappear in times like that. I'm just mostly in the moment and there's something so complete about that and it's enough" (Granite, 2010).

A sense of wholeness and integration is central to understanding what participants experience in wild places; a feeling that often eludes us as distraction and edifice complicate our lives.

As mentioned earlier, *escaping structure*, in many ways reflects and reinforces the dichotomous (however arbitrary or real this might be) relationship between 'wilderness' and 'society' where in society there are rules, structure, routine, and expectations and in wilderness those systems and structures break down (wildness). Sasha explains escaping structure and expectations in wild places:

"I think it feels very freeing. I think there's a contentment or satisfaction that comes from you know being present or just feeling like you know today I have to chop wood or today I have to build a fire. Now I have to eat . . . or go do whatever I'm doing. Go climb to the top of this summit. So it's very day to day—moment by moment—which is very different from how our society is structured. So there's always a sort of goal or finish your degree or get a job or your mortgage" (Sasha, 2010).

S.C. describes escaping rules and regulations in wild places:

"Well untamed—there are. I was kinda thinking of this before. When I hear the word untamed as a descriptor it's like a spot-on. Well I was thinking of what rules there were

like in regards to ethics. I mean there are no rules out there. Whereas in here. It's kind of weird we're talking about these two different places. There are no rules except for like ethical rules. Like you know. Don't build a fire where you're not supposed to or pack in what you pack out. And don't chop things down and all sorts of things. And here you get in trouble for walking across the street when you're not supposed to—it's like a totally different world” (S.C., 2010).

People also want to escape a society driven by consumerism and technology that feels destructive and artificial. Dover comments, for example, "But you know um you know by and large I don't really care to see people who are in the best cars and best clothes and look perfect and all that because none of that happens in the wilderness. And that feels a lot more comfortable to me" (Dover, 2010). Raven explains how wild places offer ways to experience ourselves as part of an ecological system, as part of the food chain rather than as consumers. Reflecting on 'being put back into the system in a natural way' she says,

“Even if it wasn't like a predator. Even like I get happy when mosquitoes eat me. Maybe...that idea of being able to contribute in real ways. And I guess part of that too came from the sense that I just consume—like . . . and my existence hurts the places that I love and the things that I love and so that sense of I mean just my—just by being here I'm using all these resources and sometimes that just makes me feel badly.. . And that we always have an impact. You know there is no untrammelled” (Raven, 2010).

Eva also describes escaping appearances and 'being seen' both of which involve judgments, patrol, and/or self-surveillance. Without 'being seen' she is able to experience a sense of humility and place in this world. Her experiences demonstrate, for example, how wild places offer an escape from negotiating appearances and the constructs of femininity in America. She reveals how the lack of judgment and surveillance in wild places as well as the awareness of her own mortality (escaping comfort and convenience) allow her to re-connect with her body as an animal and a 'physical being'. She says,

“Definitely. Definitely. And I feel more comfortable in my skin. Absolutely. I think I really have a daily unconscious disregard for my physical being during the day of my regular life. I think I'm far more concerned about my outward appearance for just the

usefulness of, you know, going to work. The requirements that I have—I'm more concerned with does my hair look neat, do I look clean. You know. Am I fat? I think I'm more concerned with those kinds of things when I 'm in town. And there is nothing like a wilderness experience again—my fragility really makes me you know value my existence. I mean I don't think it's excessively fragile but it definitely puts it into perspective. You know we're kind of like just little scrambling mammals on this giant globe. You know and I definitely—I definitely feel myself —definitely re-connected with my body. Definitely with a little time outside” (Eva, 2010).

Another subset of participants also voice escaping the specific structures and judgments of gender categories—they want to shed their social skins and escape people who discriminate against or don't accept them because they do not conform to a two-gendered system of male or female. More than just people, they want to escape the prescribed notion to self-define as well as the ‘means’ to do so. In wild places they are able to escape these structures most significantly because of the lack of people, lack of judgment, and indifference of nature to our social constructions of gender. At the same time—because wild lands are significantly free of these structures and expectations—they can re-connect with the gender they choose (freedom of expression/refuge) or be free of gender altogether (gender neutrality). They can also re-connect with the past—with the way humans used to exist (ecological belonging) or at least with the past as we have socially constructed it in today's world⁷. As will be discussed in the sections on 'wilderness as refuge'—the data show that wild lands offer some degree of refuge from discrimination and un-accepting people. As Beatrice (2010) describes,

"Wilderness is a place away from society . . . kind of at times away from reality. It's a place for me where I can be comfortable being myself and not fitting into anything and really a way just to get away from life, get away from everything –just relax . . . And early on I didn't know what it was. I didn't know what I was feeling. I didn't know why I felt comfortable. And really I think a big part of it was I was just really comfortable in not having to look at myself as male or female or straight or gay or lesbian or bisexual. It

⁷ The way humans used to exist or the ‘way things once were’ are values inscribed in the Wilderness Act concerning primitive experiences. For a discussion on the intellectual origins of primitiveness and concerns about ‘appropriate social and cultural relations with nature’: see Borrie, Bill (2004). Why Primitive Experiences in Wilderness? *International Journal of Wilderness*, Volume 10, Number 3.

didn't matter. It really didn't matter. I was just another creature out in the woods" (Beatrice, 2010).

2.2 Differences in physicality

Within sport and physical activity fields, the construct *physicality* has been widely discussed both theoretically and empirically; feminist scholars in particular have offered significantly nuanced accounts of women's physicality (McDermott, 1996, 2000a). For this research, however, physicality will be generally defined as how participants experience their material bodies. Indeed, many wilderness settings offer the opportunity for a different type of *physicality*. Regardless of how physically active the participant—wild land settings do still offer a distinct type of physicality. Indeed, "Existing in modern America you kind of have to be just be half-alive 'cause you just have to get through it" (Sasha, 2010). Instead of a physicality based on comfort and convenience as is often found in our urban and sedentary lifestyles —participants find they must rely on their bodies, take care of them, and love them in ways that aren't necessarily part of day-to-day care outside of wild land settings. In wilderness settings, this physicality also involves gaining a kinesthetic awareness and learning about physical abilities (mortality, age, challenge, exhaustion, injuries, strength). Also distinct in wilderness settings are different *physical connections* which are close to natural processes (sensory engagement) and based on interactions with other living things (nature and non-human animals in particular) rather than with infrastructure and technology. How your body feels phenomenologically when you walk on dirt, snow, or permafrost, for instance, is much different than how it feels when you walk on concrete or Astroturf. Also an important part of this physical connection—the notion of 'being seen', which can be judgmental, sexualized, or threatening (gendered vulnerability)—becomes almost entirely absent *without* the presence of people (varies according to in-group/out-

group). In wilderness, notions of ‘being seen’ therefore become largely about human vulnerability (predator-prey relationships, heightened senses) and/or connection (as animals in an ecosystem) rather than gendered vulnerability, judgment, discrimination, gender negotiation, or shame. Moreover, because wild places offer the opportunity for people to experience these different physicalities and physical connections—they often experience a bodily awakening as well as feelings of connectedness and integration of mind, body, and spirit.

Physicality in wild places incorporates *kinesthetic awareness*; *learning about physical abilities*; and *learning to love and appreciate one’s body as useful* (beyond sexualization and/or something we drag along behind our minds). Patsy and Eleanor explain, for example, the differences in physicality based on movement, awareness, and care:

“Well when I’ve gone backpacking I think that I’ve noticed. I mean I guess it’s not just wilderness—it’s my interaction with wilderness. But it teaches me how my body is supposed to move and digest nutrients . . . like I feel like maybe it’s supposed to be. Like we aren’t supposed to be languishing on the couch or like stooped over the critique of pure reason or something. Like we’re supposed to be hiking” (Patsy, 2010).

Eleanor says:

“I think it teaches me to listen to my body more and to use it in different ways. You know hiking or backpacking you have to listen to what your body’s telling you. Like whether or not you’re using the right or the wrong muscles. You know you can sit at a computer and type and your body’s not really gonna tell you anything except when your head starts to hurt from looking at a screen too long. But in the wilderness like when you’re using your body you have to listen to it all the time and it can totally teach you things about ways of doing things or ways of moving in terms of what it can handle” (Eleanor, 2010).

In wilderness settings—we see that a certain awareness of body becomes a central concern. Sage describes this awareness in terms of safety and rewards:

“Well it requires you to become aware of your body first of all. It—ah. And not only—you need to know when you’re hungry. You need to know when you’re getting a blister. You need to know when your toes—you can’t feel your toes and you better stop and do something about that or you’re gonna have frost bite. You need to tune into what your body is experiencing or you won’t be safe in that environment. It also I think rewards you with sort of the richness of—of experiencing and that sort of goes back to what I was

saying about skiing. You know just like oh my gosh when do I feel so whole and as I maneuver through the world. And this is—this is great and I can only do this while I'm out in this environment where I can you know feel the sun, smell the air, and you know feel the cold on my face and the difference on the sunny side from the shady side. I don't know—it just gives you all these places to be like, can you feel this? Can you feel that?" (Sage, 2010).

Granite explains kinesthetic awareness as part of 'being in my body' as well as how it is through the body that she is able to connect to her surroundings in wild places. Granite says, for instance:

"Oh you know I guess there's that independence, like when I put a pack on my back—I've got everything I need, that I can carry. And I notice my body changing you know as the days go by. It takes about three days to get into that kinda timelessness that happens. Doesn't come right off, but I can feel my body getting stronger, I feel more in my body, more embodied in a way. And I feel more connected to my surroundings in a way that I don't in a city or something" (Granite, 2010).

Although she tends to be kinesthetic—I believe her comments are applicable to recurring themes about kinesthetic awareness in the sample: using and feeling different muscles, feeling different aches and pains, and bodily awareness that involves meditative movement and rhythm. She says:

"Being more aware of my body, feeling like even the choices of movement (I: deliberate movement?) . . . yeah deliberate movement or there's a rock there, move my foot this way, um again the awareness of sun on skin, breeze on skin, that my body becomes maybe kinesthetic becomes more important than you know that mind stuff—is what it's all about. And there's something about the rhythm, the walking, the strength. I mean I can feel my body being sore even and there's the awareness of that. If I've walked a long ways. But—yeah more just a kinesthetic sense. And I tend to be kinesthetic, so I don't know if that's true for everybody" (Granite, 2010).

Part of this physicality is also about human vulnerability in terms of physicality in relation to other animals. Zara explains with the following two quotes:

"It would—it teaches you—or at least it teaches me about you're limitations. Um. You know how far you can push yourself—physically, mentally. Um. I tend to push myself too far—that's why I've had a few injuries at times. So that's where you learn that you're not invincible" (Zara, 2010).

“All of the sudden we’re just a species who are very ill-equipped. I mean if it wasn’t for our brains we would have never made it. If you compare as a human—whether female, straight, gay, whatever—to say other animals. I know this is kind of out there, but if you’re comparing what your gonna encounter out there you know their eyesight’s better, their smelling is better . . . So I mean it really kinda I don’t know—knocks you off your pedestal that we’re all on. That we’re invincible and we can conquer anything. And that’s what I like. I like that fact that you’ve gotta be on your toes. Your toes. Your senses need to be absolutely in-tuned and it’s about survival. Because in my experience, I’ve never found anything except nature that can knock you off your rocker that quick” (Zara, 2010).

In addition, the type of physicality (body as useful, being in body, learning about abilities) a person experiences in wilderness is particularly important for ‘females’ because in American society people consistently objectify and sexualize the female body. Sasha notes that:

“I think it's just very—I think that most people just aren't in their bodies at all—especially women because our bodies are objectified constantly. From the time we're like 8 (Sighs) . . . Yeah I think it teaches you to love your body and to appreciate your body. And to be—to appreciate like the physicality vs. the carnality of it . . . Just like instead of your body being something that's lusted over—it's something that you appreciate because it gets you up a mountain or helps you cross a river or whatever” (Sasha 2010).

Eva explains how a different physicality demands a different set of priorities. As a self-identified woman, she expounds on the relationship between gender, appearances, and wild land settings:

“And you know it's really more about doing than appearing. Appearances for my outward gender identity absolutely makes no—is absolutely not important to me when I'm in the woods. I feel—you know gender neutral is kind of a weird phrase to me but I don't know how else I can describe it. I'm definitely a woman and I feel like a woman but all that outer dressing, frosting, stuff, all that stuff just falls away ‘cause everything has to do with action. You know. Actions I take are going to determine the level of comfort that I'm going to experience. So, I feel like a woman but without all those trap-exterior trappings. That's just me. I don't know if I feel like any other women. I just feel like I'm more in my natural state” (Eva, 2010).

2.3 Differences in physical connections

“One of the most valuable experiences wilderness provides is the opportunity for a different kind of perceptual orienteering, a different way of locating oneself in relation to one’s environment . . . From this altered perspective, humans may be better able to

envision the kind of relationships that they would like to have with other humans, animals, and the Earth itself” ~ Greta Gaard, 1997a: 17

“But I especially—there's something about granite rock, walking up granite rock and the heat of that. And the lakes—all that. One experience that I once had that I don't think I could ever have in town is I was on a granite rock and it was nighttime and I was looking into the lake and it was a clear night and the stars were reflected in the lake. And it was like if I dove off that rock I would dive into the sky” ~ Granite, 2010

“Well, yeah the relaxing-ness. I mean it's sort of deliberate and you have to psyche yourself up to let things be that way. Kind of dropping away of physical anxiety which I had been experiencing a lot with this thesis thing and other stuff that's going on. A kind of—a kind of softening or mitigating or something of the edges of some physical grief that I feel like I've been carrying around lately. Definitely a heightened feeling of awareness of the bodies of the people that I was with. You know the smells of things—the smell of the river and the smell of the dried muck on the rocks. The way the water feels. The sun on your skin. The fire when it like gets hot on the front of you and you gotta turn around all the way” ~ July, 2010

Truly, it's the opportunity for a different type of physicality *and physical connection* in wild places that help to awaken the body so that our sense of connection is stronger, more full, more complete and in right-relation to other living things. This *physical connection* involves *being close to natural processes, sensory awareness, and lack of people/judgment*.

So, it's not just physicality that helps awaken the body but being connected to and surrounded by nature. Eva explains the difference:

“Wow you know the sights. Besides the fact that it just seems meaningless (both chuckle) to be indoors like on a treadmill I mean that just—I would rather go out in the pouring rain to do it. Not that I'm always so motivated that I'm going to go out in the pouring rain to get exercise but I mean I really rather—just you know the quality of the air and just being outside. I think the older I get and the more challenging my schedule becomes the less I just get to be outside and pay attention—even in the suburban neighborhood—birds and squirrels and sand and sky. You know just noticing the tree rather than it just being part of the green blur out there. You know there something—there's something to that that's so much better for me and I don't even know how to describe it. Just innately it just feels right to me. And then you know arriving at the hot springs, for instance, wow what a reward. You know like a natural source of hot water coming out the side of a mountain” (Eva, 2010).

Sage describes how physicality and physical connection come together to create feelings and experiences of connection. She says:

“So—in trying to answer that, but I sort of do a comparison for my urban life vs. my wilderness life. And I think the obvious like first place in difference is that there’s more connection in the wilderness—is through my body. So I feel like on a sensory level—ah there’s much more richness for me in a wilderness setting in that it’s almost like I get to return to my animal nature. Ah. And so I’m not only very aware of things, on a sensory level like you know smell, taste, touch, and you know is it hot, is it cold, is it raining, am I comfortable, and what does all this mean? But I also feel my body. I’m using my body—typically to be able to move through that space. I’m feeding myself. Ah because I need to be fed in order to be able to move. Ah. I’m sitting you know under a tree that a squirrel is up in—that same tree. So I’m sharing space with other creatures and so makes me more aware of my creature-ness and that makes me feel sort of on a par with and therefore connected to all the other sort of living entities that are in that space, too” (Sage, 2010).

Inherent in this physical connection in wilderness is being close to natural processes—air, wind, water, sun, animals. The closeness and sensual engagement with the natural world is one of the most significant parts of the wilderness setting that contributes to feelings of connection and belonging. Ouzel describes the interaction between her body and the wilderness setting in the following story about connection:

“I was up where the waters kind of first crash down and went up and leaned against the rocks and walked and got under the rocks and whhhhhhhhaaa and screaming and cleaning out and pummeled and fabulous. And then I came out and I was sitting on some flat rock right by that pummeling place. Just feeling completely cleansed, purified, transformed, really present, really ecstatic. Um. Not in my head at all (chuckle). Just loving being in my body. And this water ouzel came flying upstream. So it felt like this energetic from me of just loving that little bird. You know and welcoming it and like I’m part of being here. So it’s just felt this love energy extend from me. And then the ouzel landed on my head. (I: Are you serious?!) . . . Yeah. It was so wild. It felt like it was there for maybe a minute or two. I could feel its little claws on my scalp. I could feel it bobbing you know kind of doing its little dipper thing. (I: What did it feel like?) . . . Joy. Joy. Joy embodied. I mean I didn’t even breathe. I mean my face was split open with my smile. It was so—it was just kind of transcendent. It was really lovely to feel like I was that much a part of that place that I didn’t come across as an alien to this little guy” (Ouzel, 2010)

Sage's description of a refreshing swim after a long, hot hike sheds light on how the wilderness setting—because it offers a distinct type of physicality (body as useful, being in body) and physical connection (close to natural processes, sensory engagement)—facilitates feelings of connectedness:

“And when we got there—we were hot and tired and dirty and we hadn't seen water like this in a while. And so we all just stripped off our clothes and you know threw down our packs and stripped off our clothes and frolicked in the water. And we felt—to me—it was like such perfect embodiment of—we were so animal in our bodies at that point. They were our tools, they were our engines, they were the things that were sustaining us, they were us. And we were a community of that together. And ah—in a way that felt like wow—I'm not gonna get to glimpse this kind of connection to myself and connection to others and connection to a landscape simultaneously” (Sage, 2010).

Again, part of this distinct *physical connection* in wild places involves feeling your own *vulnerability* as Pintler describes it: “Vulnerability in a good way” (Pintler, 2010). At the heart of vulnerability is control and in wild places—humans are no longer in control. When asked what it feels like to be physically immersed in wilderness—Zara has the following response:

“Trick question. Do you have a shot gun and bear spray on you or not? (Laughs) ‘Cause that would change the whole scenario actually. For me it would. the places I go are usually pretty high risk. Um. You know god forbid I'd ever have to shoot or spray at anything. But you know if I was without protection then that puts a whole different aspect on it. ‘Cause then all of the sudden it's the hunter prey and you're prey and you'd better watch your butt. I've run into so many bears that it's just—it's pathetic at this point. I swear I have a bear magnet written on my forehead. So—that can be a scary aspect . . . (I: What is it about the high-risk element that you seek . . . that you like?) . . . It's exciting. I've always been one to live a little on the edge. I tend to get bored easily. So—for me going by myself in the backcountry and like say an area of high concentration of grizzlies. To me—that's exciting. You know and it's scary ‘cause you could die and I think that's the allure of it to me. It's because you're not in control of everything as we are in this society. The rules change. The games change” (Zara, 2010).

Similarly, Pintler describes vulnerability to the elements and awareness of mortality that in many ways contribute to feelings of connectedness. She says:

“Yeah I was feeling really good about myself and I was just feeling really good. So, I felt awe, but I don't know how to describe. Some places I go I feel connected with and some I don't and I don't know how to explain or even really why. But I felt at one with the place.

I was aware of dangers. I was climbing up this steep kinda of exposed place and kept feelin I was gonna be blown off the edge. And I really did feel like the place could kill me easily, but I felt connected and this feeling of excitement both about myself being there and just about the place. I'm like I couldn't tear myself away from it. Yeah” (Pintler, 2010).

Our physical connection in wilderness is also distinctive because it often does not involve ‘being seen’ and judged by other humans as a gendered person—either male or female (variations exist depending on presence and type of people). For example, when I asked if she felt like her body was gendered in wilderness Beatrice says:

“In some ways—no, my body is not gendered. You’re just a person. And you're whoever you want. And if you wanna be female or masculine or feminine or male or any gender or non-gendered or trans or—you wanna be anything. (I: Laughing. Anything!) . . . a fucking rainbow of gender. You can be whatever you want. And what a deer is gonna look at you because you're dressed in women's clothes and you've gotta a penis? No, they're not. They don't give a shit. They don't care” (Beatrice, 2010).

From these excerpts we see that in wilderness people become more aware of their animal-selves and the wildness within themselves as well as their relationships to other animals *as animals*. Feelings of integration, wholeness, and awareness are part of what makes possible feelings of belonging—ecological belonging in particular. These experiences occur—in part—because they are in wilderness and wilderness 1) allows people to escape structure, judgment, and technology and 2) supports physicalities that awaken the body and physical connections that are close to natural processes and away from human judgments. We can say only so much, however, about the capacity of a place to cause certain outcomes or processes. People do not, for instance, necessarily leave behind everything when they recreate in wilderness—they may carry with them certain expectations or baggage from their lives. They may carry in certain freedoms or social views. We cannot know all of these aspects of a person but we can know that it is the interaction between wild places and people that awakens the body and allows people to feel their

own vulnerability and connection within the ecological world. It is not wilderness acting on people; rather it is the interaction between the two that allows people to find a sense of ecological belonging and refuge in wild places.

2.4 Features of Wildness

“Wilderness is a place where the wild potential is fully expressed, a diversity of living and non-living beings flourishing according to their own sorts of order” ~ Gary Snyder, 1990

“What is wild is not tilled. Self-willed land does what it likes, untilled, untold, while tilled land is told what to do” ~ Griffiths, 2006: 41

Participants described the wilderness setting as a wild place. Most often wildness was characterized as a feeling or an emotion where there is pristine nature, no pollution, and lack of human influence. Other features of wild include unpredictability, boundless, exploration, potentiality, lawless, and unpatrollable. SC describes, for example, “How do I define wilderness, geez. I guess wilderness to me is just like (clears throat-pause)... a wild space... that has no boundaries” (SC, 2010). Additionally, Raven states, “So I guess I define wilderness in part as the legislation, right? The 1964 Wilderness Act. Um—and other than that I think it is just a place of wildness where there's some level of um pristine nature or at least old nature” (Raven, 2010). July 20 notes, “I guess it's insofar as any place is wild is that its explorable and exploration is really important to me both walking around and doing it or sitting and staring at things and doing it or just like thinking and doing it” (July, 2010).

Wildness also lacks structure and control. Wild is self-willed. Wildness is freedom; freedom from social constraints and physical boundaries. Wildness is the freedom for plants, animals, and ecosystems to behave and live as “free agents” (Snyder, 1990). Being immersed in wildness provides opportunities to touch what is wild within us. Margret describes, for example,

how she gains clarity in wilderness because those experiences are unmediated, unstructured, and physically challenging. She says,

“So, it’s this exposure to external elements that you experience physically and somehow your physical experience of both that exposure and also the physical challenge and difficulty of what you’re doing—it somehow unlocks this different kind of headspace that’s also wild, or raw, or untamed. For me that’s always—that’s something I really value—getting that sort of clarity” (Margret, 2010).

The word wild, however, can also become problematic in the sense that some participants feel like 1) wildness has become a romanticized notion of wilderness; 2) there isn’t much wild still remaining out there because of human influence; or 3) wildness carries particularly gendered notions of wilderness. MSU describes how he feels wildness has become romanticized:

“Actually I think there is something real about the wild description, but I think there’s something superficial about it, too. . . like I think the real part of that is —it’s just like you are at the mercy of the land and the weather when you’re out in the wilderness pretty much no matter what you do. And even if a float plane’s coming to pick you up and you’re in a cabin in Alaska, like you can be, like you know, you’re out the mercy of like wildness in terms of animals and the unpredictability and all that. And uh—same thing in Arizona places that I’ve been in Arizona. You just really get the sense the sort of wild um or like raw you said feeling, but I think it’s superficial at the same time because it can be I think really overblown in people’s imaginations. . . and um. It’s like when I think of like wild I think of like you know the um romantic paintings of the jagged mountains or something like that, but the reality of it is just much more—it’s scary, it’s not beautiful. You know what I mean. When you’re really at this, when you’re really in those situations . . . you wouldn’t say like oh wow that was wild, you would say that was brutal.” (MSU, 2010).

When I asked Zara about the words wild, raw, and untamed as descriptions of wilderness—she responds with how humans have influenced ‘wildness’:

“So—there’s still pockets and places that you can go to find that. But I think that it’s actually been affected to some extent by people . . . You know elk used to not be a mountain creature. They used to be out on the flat lands and the deserts and it was people that moved ‘em up. So I mean we’ve changed a lot of things. Even though you can still go experience the wildness of it—it’s not the same as it used to be in its pure sense. At least in the lower 48 I should say. I mean the farther north you go—the Yukon Northwest Territory—that totally changes—and I think you totally go back to absolute

wild. And it was real interesting, too because I noticed I had an encounter with a grey wolf up there. Not afraid of people at all. Like maybe hadn't even seen people. And kept surrounding us. It was probably about 11 o'clock at night. I got a ton of pictures of 'em. Kept surrounding the RV like 15 feet. Absolutely not afraid whatsoever. Whereas you get down here where they're acclimated and accustomed to people—you get different reactions. Um. So that was kind of interesting to see” (Zara, 2010).

Some participants pointed out the historically gendered nature of the word wild. Ouzel says, for example,

“Um—I specifically—I don't have that association myself. Um—but I'm reminded of a great book by Susan Griffin, *The Roaring inside Her*, and it's all about the connection of woman and nature. And it's about the way that our culture has made that a bad thing. Like that's why women are less than men because we are raw and wild and untamed” (Ouzel, 2010).

Others voiced that the word wild seems like a masculine approach to wilderness that invokes isolation instead of connection. Sage says, for instance,

“So those feel to me like a very masculine approach to a wilderness. [I: Okay] . . . And I mean in that in the archetypal sense—not that physically men would say that. But it's a—it's a—it's almost feels like an adversarial relationship to wilderness. Yeah—it doesn't really. Those would not be words I would use for my experience . . . So I think those words in addition to the gendered piece sort of create a feeling in me of isolation, you know. I think of nature as raw or wild—I think of me all by myself against nature and I guess for me a lot of my experience in nature has been breaking that sense of isolation and replacing it with one of connection—which could also be gendered in a way” (Sage, 2010).

3.0 Awakening of the Body

“For humans in relationship with wilderness, there is an emphasis on and heightened awareness of the experiential data perceived through human bodies; it becomes evident that, as a consequence of our embodiment, humans are animals” ~ Greta Gaard, 1997a:23-24

‘Awakening the body’ explains part of how and why participants are able to find a sense of belonging in wild places. As mentioned, the wilderness setting offers opportunities for distinct types of physicality and physical connection which help awaken the body. Awakening the body

can also be described as ‘feeling alive’ and includes concepts such as ‘being in my body’ (kinesthetic awareness, being present, emotional responses); ‘bodily engagement and sensory perception’; ‘wholeness/integration’; ‘learning physical abilities’; and ‘body as useful’ (See Figure 4). Many of these concepts overlap which makes teasing out the distinctions between them difficult to articulate. Although I’ve tried my best to present these concepts as they are distinct from one another—most of this section reveals their interrelatedness rather than their differences. I believe that this interrelatedness recounts how participants experience wholeness and integration—where everything (body interacting with surroundings in a dialogic relationship) is working together to awaken the body.

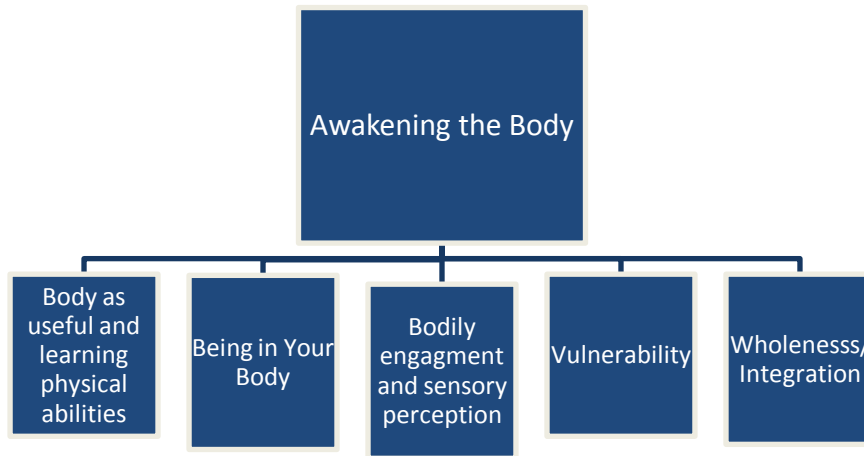


Figure 4: Awakening the Body

3.1 *Body as useful and learning abilities*

A short story from Raven reveals how feeling her '*body as useful*' in combination with awareness and heightened senses allow her to cultivate a sort of love for her body as a human animal. She says:

“Most recent would be just over the weekend. I just went out to the Nine Mile and the Nine Mile Creek Area. Yeah it was great. And obviously not a wilderness per se, but I guess there's just that idea of just inhabiting your body and the reality—it's snowed earlier, but there were moments of sunshine. And just being on uh—how do you say that—just being on the ground and the walking where there isn't a trail. It was all these like the creek bottoms and it's a big creek and floods and so we were at like the high water mark and there was um all sorts of cottonwoods and just I mean I guess the embodiment piece of it is being grateful that my body can move that way. I think there's lots of—I wouldn't say that I'm in love with my body, but I certainly am more in love with it when it's active and I'm outdoors using it. And just being kind of sensory, just aware of things, more in-tuned I guess to being a human animal” (Raven, 2010).

MSU tells of '*learning physical abilities*' but also feeling connected to people and land through awareness during times that are physically trying. He mentions both internal (kinesthetic) and external (surroundings) *awareness* which are key aspects of being in your body, bodily engagement, and sensory perception. He says:

“Yeah—I mean my experience in wilderness was like a constant physical threshold passed one after another. You know and I just I there's just so many times I can remember being in wilderness and being in either like those brutal kinds of emergencies type weird situations with the weather and stuff where you have to move really fast and get the heck outta there, especially with flash floods like in Arizona and stuff. (I: did you have any of those types?) Yeah . . . One that stands out is beating a snowstorm outta some mountains outside of Tuscon cause the trails would get really really hairy and icy. So there was one night where we had to pack up and hike at night out of ...to get down lower to get outta the snow. And just that day it was like being utterly physically exhausted. And I think if that taught me something about my body it was like just how far you can go when it hurts. But also it's just this serious, this like feeling of being really really connected to like the people I was with and the land I was with and just—it's like this really deep feeling I can't really explain . . . of just really feeling in touch and in sync with what's going on and the crazy weather and you know the terrain . . . just that awareness” (MSU, 2010).

3.2 *Being in your body*

Almost all participants mention '*being in my body*' in wild places and how good that makes them feel as if they have been disconnected from their bodies, from themselves for ages. Part of understanding 'being in your body' entails understanding what it means to 'be your body' and 'use your body' rather than just 'inhabiting your body' or 'tugging it along' as you accomplish mental tasks and chores in daily life. There are also objectified bodies which prevent people from 'being in their body'. Constant objectification, for instance, can lead to a focus on appearances and presentation that often position people outside their bodies as people become external viewers (mirrors for example) who self-survey themselves. In general, the notion of 'being in your body' allows people to feel a sort of *integration* of mind and body (and spirit for some people) by *being present* (or in the moment) and aware—both internally (kinesthetically) and externally (surroundings).

Part of 'being in your body' involves awareness, deliberate movement, and mindfulness (being present). In wild places, some participants describe this as a type of moving meditation that involves *kinesthetic awareness* and rhythm while at the same time *engaging the senses*. Granite explains, "Yeah. The rhythmic part of it um just the rhythmic nature like walking, hiking. There's something meditative about that that draws me to it. The . . . being alone or with a chosen group you know that—there's something about that um draws me to it. The smells—the um sights—uh—the sounds. I mean all that stuff. The feeling of what it's like to move my body" (Granite, 2010). Similarly, Lee comments, "I meditate a lot in the wilderness. I have a hard time meditating indoors—in a box, walls. Even when trail running I think there's a certain meditative part of running" (Lee, 2010).

Part of ‘being in your body’ involves trusting your body to act instead of churning over decisions in your head before acting. When asked about ways in which she connected to her body in primal, animal ways—perhaps maybe ways she felt connected to her own wildness, Sage responds:

“I’m kinda thinking there are differences of like that experience in Kenya was obviously a big version of that. But I think there is small versions of that in moments like I’m a big cross country skier and there are times when I’m you know like coasting down through some unbroken snow on a gentle decline and I’m just like—it feels like every fiber of my body is like in sync and I’m um it’s almost like dancing—some sort of dance. And that—that feels very primal to me because again it’s like I’m not thinking, I’m acting. And I’m trusting my body’s ability to act and that feels primal in a very sort of like sweet way” (Sage, 2010).

Here is where we start to find key differences in how we experience our bodies in wild places vs. other places. Wilderness offers a different physical connection and those distractions described within the category ‘escaping’—structure, judgment, and technology—are lifted (at least temporarily) and allow a person to center and settle into their body, themselves. The story below describes these connections between ‘escaping’ mental distractions and judgments and finding peace and *integration* in wild places by ‘*being present*’ and ‘*being in your body*’:

“Yeah. I guess I have to start by describing before I ever experience kind of ‘being present’. You know I feel like I’ve experienced a lot of my life living from the neck up. That’s how I describe it. Being really intellectual. Being really smart. Really articulate. Really verbal. I was English major. I was a secretary. Just all the various. My work in the world—like that feels like part of civilization means. Like being civilized means, it means having manners (chuckles), it means not farting or burping in public. You know not really being in your body. It means being really contained and controlled and appropriate and well behaved and tidy. Um. That containment thing—so being—for me being present and being in my body are kind of the same thing. It feels like that line at my neck that separates the animal self and the intellect self is gone. Like that I’m integrated. It’s not that my brain is turned off, but it assumes a natural proportion with the rest of me. Where there’s intelligence and knowing and presence in my heart and in my gut and in my limbs and in my digits. Where I’m really aware of being this whole system. And I’m feeling like I’m not cut out for. I feel like my emotions are very much experienced in my body. When I was younger I would really kind of try to understand them as quickly as

possible, to make them behave and to get away from kind of freaking myself with strong emotions. So if I could understand them I would be putting them in a safe tidy box. (I: Instead of just feeling them...) Right! Instead of just feeling them. And um I kind of realized that at some point there not here to just be quantified and codified. They're important information. So I've kind of made peace with that part of me. I mean I think about for me a guiding—a guiding um theme is maybe from that Mary Oliver poem—that line, "Let the soft animal of your body love what it loves". Um—for me that's what being present is when I'm in my body and I'm listening to the signals from it and I'm allowing that without judgment" (Ouzel, 2010).

3.3 Being in body and being seen

Part of what prevents people from being in their bodies is judgment from others who are looking or 'gazing' on our bodies; or at least it's our perception that they are doing so. This 'surveillance' or 'patrol' is minimal in wild places. Wilderness is valuable precisely because it's un-patrollable. You are not 'being seen' by much of anyone which allows a certain freedom of expression in the way participants carry or expose their bodies. Sasha ties together this concept of '*being seen*', '*being in your body*', and '*being present*' in the following quote:

"Yeah. That's interesting. 'Cause I feel like wilderness is a chance for people to be kind of invisible so you kind of just escape there and there aren't always people with you or there certainly no mirrors or you know. You have to kind of wear the same clothes for a long time; you get to smell your smells and all of those good things. So I think there's that, but there's also this presence I think when you're in wilderness that it's very easy to not—at least for me to not be present in my own body or in my own life like while I'm here. But I think if you're out in the woods you can't hide from yourself. You kind of you get in touch with your own stuff really fast. And so there's a presence of mind and body that happens when you're in wilderness that's a lot harder to achieve when you're in town (Sasha, 2010).

Lee describes how appearances become less of an issue in wild places which can directly affect how a person feels about insecurities or expectations relating to their body.

"I don't know sometimes though I get lost in the wilderness, like where I don't focus as much on my body. (I: What kind of (pause) focus? Would you mean like focus on feeling or focus appearance or focus on?) Yeah—appearance definitely. You're not

looking at yourself in the mirror you know for days and days and you don't really care. You're not out to shave your legs and yeah you're less focused on what other people are going to think of you or there's not that constant bombardment of your hum you're ah, not self-esteem, but you're ah hum I think we're all as human beings we're insecure. I mean that's just how we are. Doesn't matter how ah much we have, how prestigious you are. I just think everybody has insecurity—and you don't feel as insecure when you're in the wilderness. I think you can be about some things. But maybe the little things that you feel in society you don't feel so insecure about” (Lee, 2010).

Away from rules about social acceptability (escaping), many participants also talk about nakedness or exposure in wild places and the ability to *engage fully with an environment* without judgment. Often it is these experiences that allow us to re-connect with our bodies. As Patsy says, “when you're naked—that’s kind of like connecting. Often we don't like really experience ourselves without material on us” (Patsy, 2010). Swimming naked in bodies of water is mentioned frequently in reference to both *feelings of connectedness* and *physical sensations between body and nature* as well as the type of *privacy* (away from being seen or judgment) afforded in wild places to be naked and immersed in it—literally, physically. On nakedness, for instance, Patsy explains, “For me—when I'm outside I just really wanna be in nature—like be there all the way” (Patsy, 2010). Part of physical immersion in wild places for Raven is “being in a place that's remote enough that if you want to be naked you can be naked and you know bask in the sun or swim in the rivers or whatever” (Raven, 2010). When asked about physical immersion in wilderness Margret says:

“So like when you said that—just brings to mind to me jumping into a high alpine lake-naked. And that's an experience that I've had and I just like swimming in natural bodies of water without feeling like people are around who are gonna look at you or judge you or whatever. Just being isolated and free and having that—that’s like what it is about” (I: Can you tell me a little bit more about what it is about—like what types of judgments?) Well sometimes like—naked people make other people uncomfortable sometimes. We have all these sort of puritanical ideals on like relationships with body that are governing our social interactions. You know what I mean? So, for instance. Or even just like the way that somebody is watching me might sexualize my body if I was naked in front of them. Which doesn't exist in wilderness because there's nobody there or if there is

somebody there it's people who you know and like trust and you can be comfortable with. You know what I mean. It's not—so I guess that's what I'm talking about that—those weird like puritanical judgments that people put on other people or even on themselves, too. You wanna behave right in society you know. (I: Don't get arrested) Exactly. It's nice to escape that kind of' (Margret, 2010).

3.4 Bodily engagement and sensory perception

“There is a good...a good bit of just wandering around, watching, looking, listening, feeling, a lot of feeling” ~ Sophia-Margeaux, 2010

“There was that just launching into the current” ~ Sophia-Margeaux, 2010

In wild places, we are often more aware of our senses and feel them more fully.

Sometimes this is the result of direct bodily engagement with nature such as swimming in an alpine lake or feeling the sun on our skin and a warm granite rock beneath us (Granite, 2010).

Other times our senses are heightened in order to survive or because we feel vulnerable and afraid in wild places. Marty explains how in wild places—she is more aware and alert because she is able to let go of distraction (from society) and her focus becomes more about survival. She says,

“When you've really left behind those thoughts that you know of society and you've let them go and you're more—your sensations are alive. You know—senses of vision, and sound—and smell and you know touch and you're just alert to your surroundings because you've kind of reverted back to those some of those innate survival you know” (Marty, 2010).

There is also something to say for the environment that surrounds you in wild places that is often distinct (closer to natural processes, wild animals) and frequently engages the human senses in ways that are not so easily experienced in urban environments. For example,

“And then you know arriving at the hot springs, for instance, wow what a reward. You know like a natural source of hot water coming out the side of a mountain. You know there's a certain thrill to that. And then not wearing a bathing suit in the water you know makes you feel like—I hate to say it quotes but you know like a 'natural woman' you know that you're kind of closer to what I really am inside. And just feeling getting closer to that is a thrill and a big comfort to me” (Eva, 2010).

Several participants experience direct engagement of their bodies and their senses in wild places by collecting wild plants or herbs. Zara, for instance, tells some stories about collecting berries and what senses she uses to harvest mushrooms:

“I mean one of the recent trips I guess which in a sense would be physical was picking blueberries up on the tundra of the Arctic Circle. That was a really cool hands-on experience. Um—just the whole act of walking and sinking 8 inches into the squooshiness of the tundra. I mean it was kind of a surreal type of environment—going through burns where it caught on fire I mean remember taking a picture of my hands after I'd spend a couple hours out there and it was just completely darkened and black from the burn and just completely purple from all the berry patches I'd been going through. And to me it was amazing that it was just so plentiful in an area that you would think so devoid of life. Um. So that was kinda one instance” (Zara, 2010).

“Mushrooms . . . it's a lot more smell. It's very texture oriented with mushrooms. Um. You know and obviously you kind of pulling around little bit of dirt at the bottom looking for rings seeing if it's poisonous. You're checking under the caps. You're feeling them. You know is it rotten? Is it ready to eat? So—it's more a texture thing. There's one mushroom—I think it's a chanterelle. You go for smell to kind—as another identification. For the most part—I think it would be more of a hands-on texture. And then consulted your guide book just to double check (chuckle)” (Zara, 2010).

3.5 Vulnerability

“But it gave me information that I didn't have on just my own. And so—um—maybe, and maybe the whole word for all that is I felt more vulnerable without the dog” ~ Granite, 2010

It's important to remember that awareness may take many forms and while awareness is central to awakening the body (being in body, sensory perception), it is not just kinesthetic awareness such as feeling your muscles or feeling your body in space. Interviewees also become

aware of their vulnerability to dangers or threats. Those threats might include other predators—both human and non-human. Several participants related this vulnerability to gender/sexuality in terms of fear, safety, rape, and violence. They felt vulnerable either because of their gender as a woman; because of non-accepting humans in terms of gender ambiguity, transgender, or cross-dressing; or because of their gender/sexual orientation as gay or lesbian. Sophia-Margeaux says, for example:

“What has kept me intact for what 44 years of cross-dressing? Ha ha ha. Yeah. Part of it's just being good as far as you know well that's one thing about out and about even in wilderness it's like I go on the total full on animal awareness. Like I am totally keyed. My senses of sight and hearing and smell are heightened to where I can smell people, particularly if they are on horseback, coming along the trail. And I'm off the trail and they pass me unseen. Yeah” (Sophia Margeaux, 2010)

Gendered vulnerability, however, will be discussed more thoroughly in subsequent sections on gender and refuge in wilderness. For this section, I would like to focus on human vulnerability to predation and to natural elements (weather, exposure)—most of which involve a keen awareness of one's own vulnerability as part of the food chain (bodily responses such as fear). This type of vulnerability is possible in wilderness because of the presence of predators; because we lack control; and because we can gain a sense of humility. Sharrel explains,

“Means that it's not a controlled environment. You can't control the temperature. You can't control the weather for being outside but more in wilderness you know that you're not going to control the encounters. You may run across wildlife. You may not. You don't necessarily have control of anything else that's around you” (Sharrel, 2010).

By making ourselves vulnerable—we voluntarily open ourselves to fear. But the value in vulnerability is the possibility of transformation and connection. We give up our sense of control and risk the chance of injury or death to experience what we have lost touch with—our

‘scrambling mammal’ selves. We make ourselves vulnerable to connect with other living things—as we do and would in many relationships. As Raven comments,

“I would say it's both. Like in really practical ways like being able to choose a course of action and then—yeah mentally just feeling more-I mean it's kind of um that paradox of feeling incredibly vulnerable, but I don't know if it's like accepting your vulnerability and being able to be at ease with that or if kind of pushing the limits really creates a sort of fierce survival instincts” (Raven, 2010).

The following story from Ouzel describes the sort of transformation that she experiences through vulnerability and choosing a course of action in the wild. I asked her to describe the birth canal metaphor (for a rock tunnel leading to a waterfall) that she had mentioned earlier in the interview. She responds:

“Yeah. I think I mean I really like when those opportunities for transition or transformation show up. I feel that also often when I'm going into the woods and I cross water. It kinda feels like a gateway—like crossing from one form of reality to another. And there's kind of this purification and this letting go of all the trappings of civilization and all the expectations and all the yackety yack. The ego, the brain, the dizziness of the work day, the date book, the clocks and the watches, and the bleh bleh bleh bleh. And so that birth canal thing just feels like a much more powerful experience of that. It's not only tripping across a little creek, but going through the passage through darkness. Um. Passage through mystery. It takes some work. There's a little bit of fear involved like you know are these boulders gonna fall and crash and crunch my head. And the willingness like it feels like it's um like I have birthed a child many many years ago. And I remember learning about it. I did so much reading. One thing that really intrigued me—they were looking at what starts labor. And apparently it's—something is initiated from the infant. Like when the baby is completely cooked—something goes on where the infant initiates labor. And I like that set of —like it's not about being forceful. It's not about pushing. But it is kind of choosing and not being completely passive. And so approaching that birth canal in the rock is like I can choose and I must choose if I want to experience transformation. If I want to experience release of an old form and emerging into something new. I can't just lay there on the picnic rock. I have to work to choose it and work with it. I can't manipulate it either. I have to receive the gift, but then I also have to be active. And I feel like in my work as a therapist and my work as a shaman and my work as a pagan—I'm really turned on my the turning of the wheel and the death-rebirth cycle. The rite of passage and all that that's kind of embodied you know the birth canal is a pretty essential element to all of that” (Ouzel, 2010).

We also open ourselves up to vulnerability to connect with nature and to ourselves partly because it feels good and exciting to have made it through successfully (i.e. not dying). Raven says, for example, “But I didn’t—I guess, too, there’s that piece of—that I’m not as judgmental. Like if you survive and come out of it and don’t hurt anything...then that seems like a success. So maybe it’s redefining success” (Raven, 2010). It’s satisfying to access parts of yourself that stay hidden in a society so concerned with control, structure, comfort, and safety. Margret expresses the differences in what she has to be afraid of in wilderness, the elements and non-human predators. She says,

“And like a lot of what I think about with wilderness is danger or risk or physical challenge. But the fact is that I think in some ways feel safer in wilderness. Like the things you have to be afraid of are...there just different than what you have here in the city. And while I worry about the elements like I said exposure like rain or snow or unexpected weather events. And I worry about wildlife a lot like getting eaten by a bear which is completely unrealistic. But I still worry about the elements like I said exposure like rain or snow or unexpected weather events. And I worry about wildlife a lot like getting eaten by a bear which is completely unrealistic” (Margret, 2010).

Sharrel expresses the thrill of feeling not totally in control while on the water:

“Oh—that brings me back to love of water (laughing). There’s nothing compared to the excitement and the adrenaline of being on the water in the middle of nowhere (laughing) with no one in the immediate vicinity to help you. It’s just exciting and it’s challenging. It’s just uhhhhh! It’s exhilarating. It makes you feel...well it makes me feel more alive to be on the water in the wilderness than I can feel anywhere else. Because I have some small measure of control as far as steering the boat or whatnot but water always has that unknown element—it just never acts the same way twice” (Sharrel, 2010).

MSU describes how wilderness experiences can be simultaneously harsh and lovely:

“Yeah—time, but also just like, um, just that—there’s something about feeling exhausted—reminds me of being immersed and thinking about one of my very very first wilderness trips of my life that I actually understood that that’s what I was doing. I was working on a trail out North Kaibab in the Kanab Creek Wilderness and um it was hot...it was sandy (I: Is that southern Utah?) . . . it’s northern Arizona ...like out by Fredonia...yeah and it’s that place...it’s like mini-grand canyons everywhere. So it’s really really gorgeous, but it like it’s so harsh. The environment is so harsh. There’s very little water. A lot of sand blowing around you, a lot of like really really hot hot sun . . . and you just, it’s just like there’s no rest from it. And that feeling of just being exhausted and the

sand is like cutting up and I got rashes all over my arms and the sand and like all my shirts were just like stained white from sweat and it was just like this constant like feeling of that environment just hitting me. Yeah...but it was lovely at the same time. It was like I would do it over and over again if I could. It was really fun. (Laughs). Of course you know I was working out there too. So that's something I really strongly associate with wilderness—is just like really really really hard physical labor” (MSU, 2010).

Because Zara had mentioned meeting bears several times, I asked her to tell me a story about one and how she felt during that moment. She says:

“Paralyzed comes to mind. You know they always say hold your ground, stand still. But when you got one 10 feet in front of you—you don't have a choice ‘cause your body literally doesn't move. I mean you're just paralyzed. And uh—so that's kinda crazy. That was one of many. I was charged one time. And at the point I even had a 44 on my hip and bear spray—it was outside of Yellowstone and I was charged by a black bear. And I tell you what—even with that—all the sudden your sense of security goes right down the drain. And you just think—ahhh—is this a bluff or is it not. I mean you just kind of freeze. It's kind of a surreal type of experience. It's scary without a doubt. But then after everything is cool and they leave and you leave and you're safe it's like wow that was exhilarating. (I: Yeah. I made it!) I made it. I lived. Yeah-absolutely, absolutely” (Zara, 2010).

Vulnerability thus can manifest in very positive ways in the wilderness. Interactions with predators, for example, can be both terrifying and exhilarating. The willingness to take those ‘risks’ (if you choose to call them such) can result in absolutely magical encounters. Sophia-Margeaux’s tale of her wolf encounter is evidence of that magic and that journey toward finding what it means to belong to an ecological community; a journey that evokes both curiosity and intrigue. She begins:

“And I hiked for two or three hours and got to the high meadows at the summit in the divide between drainages. Took a break—off the trail at the edge of the meadows there sittin on a log. and uh got towards where the sun was getting low and I needed to head back down headed across the trail there cross the meadow back towards the trail and this wolf howled in the forest right back beyond where I had just been sitting on a log. And I was like oh my gosh (both laugh)....I...I've been watched. Apparently the wolves either clued into my presence from the bottom end and followed me clear up there. I don't know but anyway there was this wolf howling right where, near where I had just been sitting. Then another one howled from the other side of the meadow. So I'm like, hmm,

they're all up here and they're all around me (laughing). It made me kinda anxious . . . and I headed on down the trail. There's a place on the trail where there's some really fabulous hoodoos, and pines and little slot canyons . . . so I'll step off the trail and hide in these rocks and have a look at the trail down below and if these wolves are following me, I'll see 'em (laughs). Got down there as the last light was lighting those rocks like up you could see through those trees like some kinda lost city. It's a totally cool place. If you ever come down here we should go there sometime. But anyway. But I waited and waited and sun went down and said, hum, no wolves (laughing). So I climbed down the rocks and headed back down to the trail and just as I was. I was getting onto the trail and got onto the trail I heard this wolf howl down in front of me. And then I heard some ah activity in the brush at the creek bottom and looked down to see the back end and tail of a wolf disappear in the brush. Whew. Now there in front of me (both laughing). Some wolf got up on that creek to the right of me and started howling and it was joined by another wolf above me to the left. They all started in. I figured I discerned like 5, 6, or 7 different wolf howling on either side of me carrying on. I howled. That shut 'em up momentarily. Somewhere in that time I picked up a big stick and thought...well if I have to defend myself (both laughing, I: you have that stick anyway) . . . Yeah doing a lot of good. Pack of wolves and a guy in a dress...with a stick. But uh. They were momentarily silenced. But then they started in with this incredible cacophony of howling, total symphony. And I was like oh whatever. I'll go on I gotta get to the car it's gettin toward dark and I had a bit a ways to go yet. So I walked on and I didn't get the sense the wolves were following me at that point, but they howled and they howled and they howled till I got bout a ear shot and I thought well they were just curious as who and what I was . . . Deciding I was okay and honored me with a symphony on my out. That was my best, ever, wolf wilderness encounter" (Sophia-Margeaux, 2010)

3.6 Wholeness/integration

"And then when your body's not wild you lose some sort of mind wildness like creativity or something" ~ Margret, 2010

"And I like my life. I mean I like living in town. I like going out. There's kind of a duality to all of that. And I think it's sort of easy to get out of balance" ~ Sasha, 2010

"Again I think it's kinda the strength and vulnerability both—like being tough, being tender, being aware and just mindful and present" ~ Raven, 2010

Again, 'getting out of balance' is quite easy to do in a society that focuses so much on mental and intellectual tasks and priorities. In wild places many participants feel an awakening of the body not felt in their day-to-day lives. But wilderness experiences are not purely physical—it is described that they integrate the physical, mental, and spiritual. As SC comments,

“Well my body feels most normal when I'm in wilderness. Healthy. I'm quite in-tuned with my body when I'm out in the wilderness. And my mind, my surroundings. . . . And I guess for me it's physical and mental and spiritual. They all coincide with one another. So not only does my body feel liberated—my mind feels liberated. And the thoughts—it just makes much more sense. Everything makes more sense. But then I also become confused about this other world that I live in—conflicting. I guess sometimes I refer to my body needing to yawn. (I: What's that like?) I guess sometimes I just walk around town or sit down and I—I'm really into metaphor and stuff like that. So sometimes I constantly think to myself—my body just needs to yawn. So when I'm out in these places I feel as though my body is yawning. Kind of feel good after you yawn. (SC, 2010).

This is what makes them so valuable—wilderness is a place of release and an opportunity for integration. Wilderness allows mental rest and escape from distractions and provides opportunities for people to have presence of mind and body in order to live in the moment, be fully present, and connect with the self and with others. Sasha describes how wilderness puts things in perspective:

“Well, I think that it's easy to get kind of burdened by work or relationships or school or whatever it is you're dealing with in your day-to-day life. And just I think being in wilderness or even just being up Pattee Canyon or somewhere can just kinda help you realize your shit is not really that important and that there's something bigger out there and um I guess I don't know it just helps me feel more connected to my own body and to my own self, my inner self” (Sasha, 2010).

Equally important, when inquiring about physical immersion, July describes integration of the senses:

“Alertness I guess and stimulation. But not in a grating or chaffing way. A kind of synesthesia. (I: Synesthesia?) Yeah like kind of . . . (I: I don't know if I'm familiar with that word) I mean I might not be using it properly. But it's like what people call it when—like Nabokov talked about how he had ‘cause all the letters of the alphabet for him had definite distinct colors—colors he's had all his life. So it's like having your senses crossed a little bit or not knowing which one you're using . . . Like some people are like whenever I hear the Star Spangled Banner I smell roses . . . You know so they have synesthesia—they hear with their ears but they experience it with their smell. So, like something about the senses being sort of strong enough that they're having overlapping territory I think. Which for the purposes of having just like one word for it—I'm gonna call it synesthesia where they're kind of running together, working together. A feeling of your body being networked with the other things around you. A physically

awareness of the things around as being alive and having being rather than being objects primarily. Yeah more than anything else—just a feeling of attention I think. And not just like you're paying attention but that something might be paying attention to you (July, 2010).

Experiencing integration is essential for the well-being of most interviewees. Without wild places to escape, there is little in the way of places to explore this type of integration of mind, body, and spirit. Wilderness experiences, however, can elucidate ways in which this integration can occur. Wild places are important for stimulating wildness within ourselves. As I will describe further in the discussion section—it is through this wildness (our animal selves) that we are able to feel a sense of ecological belonging and connection with ourselves, with others, and with the planet. Sage provides some insight on why we may have made such compromises in 'society':

“But I think it's just—I don't know. So I'm sitting outside in a very urban environment right now and I'm like what is it about this that feels like it doesn't let me connect in that same way. Well I can't go running around the street naked . . . so (I: Right). So breaking those social constructs—so that's—there are rules for us humans to live in such close proximity. There's certain behavioral rules that um sort of are about what humans need, not what's natural for humans. I think there's a lot of that kind of thing going on. Like compromises we've made to be living in such density that are not aligned with our true natures or don't allow expression of certain parts of our true natures that are much more physical I'd say” (Sage, 2010).

4.0 Feelings of Connectedness in Wilderness

“It supports the wildness that's beyond human culture within me” ~ Sophia-Margeaux, 2010

'*Feelings of connection*' (see Figure 5) explain part of how and why participants are able to find a sense of belonging in wild places. During interviews—participants voiced having profound experiences of connection: *connection with self, with others, with the past, and with the planet (spiritual and ecological)*. These connections are often difficult to attain 'outside' of wild

places. As mentioned in sections on escaping—the distractions, structures, and judgments of society often prevent people from making these connections. Because people often tend to live much of their lives 'from the neck up', dragging their bodies around to complete tasks and keep up with routines and schedules, participants thus often feel disconnected from themselves and from the natural world on many levels: physical, mental, and spiritual. Pintler describes, for example,

“Well. If I’m, not that they chop wood or anything, but I feel closer to wild animals. When I’m sitting in front of a computer or driving a car I feel very alienated from nature, but when I’m . . . I don’t hunt or fish, but let’s say, I mean I like the idea where you are doing the basic survival stuff using the real basic tools like a knife or yeah a saw or your hands or whatever. And um . . . (Pause) yeah I guess I like the idea of feeling close to wild animals you know ‘cause it’s, as opposed to civilization” (Pintler, 2010).

In wilderness people often experience physical challenges and have time for relaxation, and self-reflection. Many seek connections with their 'animal selves' and 'with the past':

connections perhaps that modern American society has started to forget or something that people can't quite achieve indoors. Part of connection comes from the awakening of the body, feelings of vulnerability and fear, and unexplainable feelings of wholeness or ‘what is right’. Pintler describes how using her body in wild places makes her feel closer to her animal self. She says,

“It feels good to use the muscles and that self-reliance. you know you’re. it feels real. Like the whole survival stuff. Like the basic needs that you have to cut the wood to build the house or build the fire and you have to go catch the food instead of just walking to the store and buying stuff and buying a house and sitting in front of the computer. it just feels really real and basic and close to maybe close to wild animals moreso than the life I lead, live here” (Pintler, 2010).

It's interesting, too, that people feel connected to themselves and to the world when they feel as though they are 'part of the food chain'. When they feel vulnerable and aware of their own mortality, they feel a sense of belonging. They express, for example, some of James Hatley (2004) sentiments in the article, “The Uncanny Goodness of Being Edible to Bears” when he describes that “In being of flesh, one finds that one’s very life is already the articulation of all

other flesh. Before one can be oneself, whether that self be human or bear, one's body is already inextricably interwoven with all other bodies" (22).

Some participants even voice a sense of guilt or 'existential despair' that humans are often considered 'the plague of the earth' as we continue to destroy wild places and replace them with infrastructure and human-made things. Beatrice says, for instance, that when she goes to wilderness she

"reconnect[s] with the creature within. I think so. I mean I think that when you're out in the wilderness you realize how truly small you are and you realize how small of a part of the picture you are. Hum or at least for me I mean you know I used to think that you know that I was this almighty powerful person and it's just like fuck no. I'm just, I'm just, I'm just another organism in the environment and in some ways I'm the plague. I mean humans in some ways are the plague of the earth" (Beatrice, 2010).

As modern industrialization encourages human domination over nature—this too can alienate people from themselves as a part of an ecological system. As Val Plumwood (1993) explains, this model of domination evolved from a 'master model'—a model that represents the identity of a Western culture rooted in dualisms (for example: human/nature; men/women; mind/body; self/other; heterosexual/other; white/non-white); that perpetuate alienation and oppression by devaluing the 'other' through the logic of domination. Interestingly, Greta Gaard (1997a) points out that

"The critical point to remember is that the devalued 'Other' is 'alienated from nature' through some function of the culture created by the master; of course, each of the oppressed identity groups is simultaneously seen as 'closer to nature' in the dualisms and ideology of Western culture. This contradiction of distance and proximity is of no interest to the master, though such contradictions have been of great interest to feminists, who have argued that it is precisely such contradictions that characterize oppressive structures" (9)

Queer people are told, for example, that homosexual acts are 'un-natural'; and frequently we are told there are no non-human equivalents. But we are also told that engaging in 'homosexual

activity' results from our inability to resist temptations: an ability that is arguably part of procuring a civilized and Christian self morally apart from and above nature. We are therefore believed to be un-natural because we cannot resist our own natural impulses, an interesting contradiction. Are we then made to feel alienated from nature, from culture, or from our own nature?

In many ways, the data show that experiences in wild places can help placate feelings of alienation by virtue of connecting with one's 'true self', 'animal self', or 'best self'; with other 'kindred spirits' and animals; and with place, planet, or universe. Indeed, connecting to 'animal self' in wilderness may change the potential for ecological belonging. "Humans in relationship to culture, specifically Western industrialized culture", for example,

"Are not aware of the ways that culture controls our perceptual 'orienting': space, energy, sight, smells, sounds, and even our sense of time all are developed in relationship to our immediate surroundings, and together provide a framework within which we define the parameters of our world, and within which a sense of self-identity is developed. If we allow it to happen, all of these dimensions can be radically realigned in wilderness" (Gaard, 1997a: 17)

In many ways, feelings of connection in wilderness seem to contrast feelings of 'existential despair' or feelings that humans don't contribute to the well-being of the planet. For example, after Pintler voiced "but I guess I would like the idea of me living like a wild animal even though I don't think I ever will" I asked her what that would mean. She said:

"Cause I'm not fucking up nature as much maybe. Um, it just seems more real. I don't think that the way we live our lives, um. There's something really wrong. The way we've evolved from being from whatever we were, you know back in the stone age or whatever. But just this whole thing with cars and plastic and roads and living in little houses and wearing clothes seems really odd. So I guess when I'm in nature I'm closer to that primal thing. Although I also like the comforts of civilization. It's nice and warm right now. If I was outside in a little snow cave I wouldn't be as happy maybe" (Pintler, 2010).

Wilderness offers the opportunity for people to become 'aware of their own mortality' by being 'close to natural processes' and experiencing a different connection: a world with risk and non-human predators. As will be demonstrated, sharing space, physicality, spirituality, and vulnerability in wilderness is a powerful medium by which to make these distinct and invaluable connections: connections that make possible a sense of ecological, spiritual, and social belonging.

Interestingly, these stories about connection surfaced in the data from a focus (questions asked) on gender and bodily experiences in wilderness. These stories are about inter-connection and wholeness where distinctions between what is physical and what is spiritual are not so clear, nor do they need to be. As Granite reminds us, “If I wanna yell I can yell. If I wanna run I can run. You know it's just um it's a very physical thing and yet it's at the same time it's a very spiritual thing” (Granite, 2010). Indeed, feeling connected to self, to others, and to the world evokes feelings of wholeness or completeness, perhaps a kind of elated relaxation or a filling up, a welling up inside that's comforting and central to experiences in wild places. Significant types of connections that surfaced in the data include *connection with self*, *connection with others*, and *connection to something bigger* (ecosystem, planet, and/or universe). These connections manifest at physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual levels.

There are exceptions and constraints, however, to feeling connected as sometimes participants experience different degrees of loneliness in wild places. These experiences often occur when people are alone for too long or in a place where they feel really isolated. As MSU recalls:

“I also worked in wilderness in Alaska which was . . . totally different. And uh there it was this feeling of like solitude to the point of isolation. It was like a really harsh wilderness there (I: Isolation from people or from everything?) Yeah it's weird because

we have cabins. Like cabins are good in wilderness in Alaska. And there even like maintained and built and all that. So we had like buildings, physical buildings. But I literally . . . working out there for summers and would only see 3 people outside of my crews over three months (I: wow). So it was like you got really excited when the pilots came to pick you up (I: give you the news..!). Yeah so it was like...isolation. I once spent 24 days out there straight and it was . . . It wasn't bad, but it was definitely the solitude, the experience of solitude there was a lonelier feeling than lower 48 for sure" (MSU, 2010).

Being 'alone for too long' can help with self-reflection but it can also 'cause demons to come up': things like unresolved conflicts or anxiety. For example, after Pintler voiced that she felt normal and natural in wilderness I asked her why. She says,

"Yeah I don't even know. I just when I'm in the city too much—I just don't feel right. I don't even know how to explain that. I don't necessarily go into wilderness areas and come out feeling good. A lot of times I go out and feel worse when I come back because all the demons came up because I was alone too long. All those bad thoughts—the baggage that we all carry around, unresolved conflicts comes up, but um. I don't know how to explain that" (Pintler, 2010).

Other 'constraints' to connecting include presences of stock or too many people as well as lack of physical ability because of fitness and/or injury. On physical fitness, for example, Dover says:

"So, and like I said over the years by making some mistakes I have learned that I can enjoy being outdoors and being in the wilderness so much more if I know I'm in good shape and if I've prepared—mentally, physically, you know, practically with the equipment I choose. I mean all those kind of things that have to kind of come together to make it an experience that's really a positive experience. Negative experiences you have stories to have sometimes, but at the time they're happening it's not that great. And I just wanna be able to feel good enough physically so that I can enjoy mentally. So—I sort of see that you know coming together" (Dover, 2010).

Sage describes how injuries affect her ability to experience rich connections in wild places:

"And it's interesting—that trip was actually a first trip towards the end of a recovery from an injury and so my relationship to my body on that trip was actually tenuous and a little bit troubled and so there were ways in which I physically wasn't capable in ways that I was used to. But there were also ways in which I was having to re-establish a relationship and trust in my body's ability to do stuff that it used to be able to do and hadn't been able to do for a period of time. So the overall quality of that trip was—cautious and didn't feel. I felt more sort of like on the edge of my capacity and therefore the connections—felt more threatening than you know like enriching" (Sage, 2010).

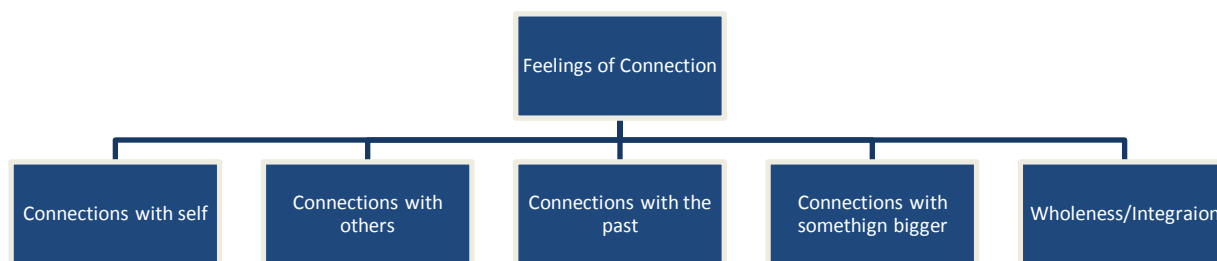


Figure 5: Feelings of Connection in Wilderness

4.1 Connecting with self: true self, best self, and animal self

Participants voiced connecting with themselves by using phrases such as ‘the creature within’, ‘true-self’, ‘animal-self’, or ‘best self’. Overall, participants did not make finite distinctions between physical and spiritual connections; rather they seem to be all-encompassing. Raven says, for instance,

“And then wilderness specifically I think of as identity or wild places just in what they—one in that I value them tremendously even if I don't get to visit them and then also just because they make me so—I guess that sense of being my best self. (I: Yeah. Can you tell me a little bit about the 'best self' that you described? Like what does that mean to you?) Like I know that when I'm out I feel far happier. I'm more excited and I'm more curious and um generally like have this sense of wonder or this sense of awe um. Like life wanting to live in the midst of other life....wanting to live as Albert Schweitzer's kind of reference for life thing. And then in more practical terms—I'm really, I can be decisive in the out of doors. Like I feel more generally more confident and more just capable I guess of magic. And also you have to be so mindful you know like I really like that sense of actions that matter—life or death that matters” (Raven, 2010).

Moreover, it's not uncommon for participants to find in wilderness what is ‘more real’ or ‘more natural’. Keeping in mind that words like ‘real’, ‘best’ and ‘natural’ can become difficult, perhaps we can still look instead at what is ‘essential for overall well-being’. Ouzel, for example, illustrates why wild places are essential for her well-being:

“I go to wilderness to renew. I go there to dissolve the boundaries that being in civilization starts to build up in me. It's almost like being in civilization builds up these

toxicities in my energy field. And then I go to wilderness to cleanse those away and to return to the state of grace that I think we were all born to live in. So I go there for renewal and purification and remembering the truth of who I am” (Ouzel, 2010). For most participants it’s ‘like coming home’. Granite says, for example,

“Well, ever since I was a kid and uh went to the mountains I always felt that was home. And uh. so it's been my favorite place to be in the mountains and there's just something spiritual about it, something comforting about it, something whole about it, hum—maybe I feel like I'm more myself there, uh. So—and there's something very relaxing about it—just to have timeless time. So, yeah wilderness to me is that, that place of being with myself in a really full way” (Granite, 2010).

Still others mention exercise outdoors as ‘quieting’ (Eva) and the simple act of walking as a way of merging (Ouzel) with one’s environment. Indeed, the meditative qualities found in wilderness are something that most interviewees voiced with terms such as feeling relaxed, calm, at peace, and at one with a place; many of these meditative qualities surface because of the opportunity for a different physicality and physical connections and to escape distractions.

Others voiced connecting with self or the creature within specifically because there were no expectations or social categories (such as gender and sexuality) to fit into or people to appease. Sharrel says, for instance that

“Just because I guess I feel most myself when I'm in the wilderness. I don't feel like I have to act or speak or do anything in particular to please you know the wilderness. Like I sometimes feel when I'm just with people or in you know school or at town or wherever—when I'm in the wilderness I really connect with who I am and think about anything I wanna think about. And I just kinda don't worry as much about labeling myself any particular way” (Sharrel, 2010).

Beatrice shares a similar story about escaping social categories and appearances and finding comfort and connection with self in wild places. She says,

“But hum just being able to relax and not have to fit into anything is really key for me in the wilderness. It's something I really enjoyed because even before I did find myself—going out in the wilderness you could just be —if I was on the river or on the lake or whatever I could just be comfortable. And I didn't have to think about all the rules and I didn't have to think about the reality of the fact that I didn't fit into something. I didn't have to look at myself in the mirror. I didn't have to worry about how my hair looked. I

didn't have to worry about if I looked like a tragic train wreck. I didn't have to worry about any of that. I could just be myself and not really have to fit anything. And you know that was. I would say that's an interesting thing 'cause the hardest thing for me when I did go out was like that last 30-40 minutes before you know everything's done and you're coming back to reality and you're coming back to modern civilization and you're coming back to this—this life that you've created around yourself. It was a really difficult time for me 'cause I was like I don't wanna-I don't wanna give up this comfortability that I found. I don't wanna give up this safety net that I've created for myself. I don't wanna give up any of this. And early on I didn't know what it was. I didn't know what I was feeling. I didn't know why I felt comfortable. And really I think a big part of it was I just really comfortable in not having to look at myself as male or female or straight or gay or lesbian or bisexual. It didn't matter. It really didn't matter. I was just another creature out in the woods” (Beatrice, 2010).

4.2 Connecting with self and vulnerability

“What I fear and desire most in this world is passion. I fear it because it promises to be spontaneous, out of my control, unnamed, beyond my reasonable self. I desire it because passion has color, like the landscape before me. It is no pale. It is not neutral. It reveals the backside of the heart” ~ Terry Tempest Williams, 1995: 5

Again, we see the paradox of connecting through vulnerability. Participants find comfort in vulnerability and unpredictability; they find that it makes them feel alive and in right relation with other living things. Raven says

“I think like I just wanna feel alive. Um and bodily experience I guess—again sorta coming back to knowing that I'm part of a system and being both—like feeling my mortality and feeling um—like I take great comfort in the idea of being . . . eaten-by creatures. Like decomposing or whatever. So-I guess I'm—I just wanna feel alive and like in touch with that sort of animal body that I inhabit” (Raven, 2010).

Feeling vulnerable is a bodily sensation—it's emotion, feeling, and response. It is fear and rapid heartbeats. Just knowing that you are not at the top of the food chain is much different than experiencing yourself as prey—vulnerable and afraid. Lee says,

“And you know I 'm going go for a hike and you don't know where it's going to lead you around the next corner and that's always like an adventure you know. And uh and it's scary at the same time. You're carrying bear spray 'cause you know even though bears are hibernating you're still like fearful that you might run into a mountain lion 'cause you see tracks or um wolves tracks you know. And when you have two dogs—that's kind of nerve racking. So there's that excitement” (Lee, 2010).

Ouzel explains how wilderness teaches her about accepting her vulnerability and mortality:

“I definitely feel like it teaches me things about my body. I think it teaches me about the fragility of my body. You know that I will see—when you're out in wild you see the whole continuum of birth, youth, vigor, and decomposition, and decay and breakdown. And so it kind of teaches me —um that my body is mortal. That I can't just kind of power through it—push and force and always demand of my body. That it does have its limits and that those are natural. And yeah I can expand them through training and nurturance and good care. But that I—I think that's a huge thing the wilderness teaches me. Just that I'm mortal. And that that's not a bad thing. Like the way I see it in the wild you know if I come across a—come across bones . . . they're so beautiful. And here's this evidence of—civilization would say failure—death is failure in the medical model certainly. And yet there's so much beauty in them. You know you see in a log that's down and it's a nurse log and there's new life just coming right out of it. And even the way that I am in the wild. I've had to—it's really been a good teacher about knowing my limits and listening to the signals that I get from my body. The pain signals—that I can't over do it. That I have to treat my body with kindness and with respect. And I have to allow it to move through that cycle. I have to allow that my 47 year old body is not as strong and vigorous as my 20 year old body was. And that that's not a bad thing. That that's a natural thing” (Ouzel, 2010).

When I ask Granite if she thought wilderness experiences are wild, raw, or untamed she responds with a story that reveals how the excitement of wildness engages the wildness within her. She says,

“Yeah I mean of course they are. Like I think of in the spring starting to hike and the water is just, I mean it's out of control—it's coming down so hard from the melting ice. Um. And there's a wildness about that. And that you might run into a bear, deer, you know critters. And you never know. Sometimes you do. Sometimes you don't. Um. I've been up high with lightning and knowing that (laughing)—get under cover (laughing). So—you have to be aware of weather in a way that you might not be aware of weather. You have to know whether it's gonna get cold. I've been up in the Sierra and it's starting to snow and you gotta get down quick. I mean stuff like that is the wildness part. But I don't find that frightening or um—there's kinda an excitement about that. I think I like the wildness. I think that it touches maybe that wildness in me a little bit. It calls to me. It's okay to be wild and not so . . . (interviewee shakes/moves her head from side to side which interviewer interprets as indicate ‘the not so ‘ho-hum’ or tame)’” (Granite, 2010).

4.3 Connection with others: human, non-human, and kindred spirits

“And interactions with people in wilderness are always, seems like, really deep and full. There’s no facades in the same way” ~ Granite, 2010

Interviewees also voiced connecting with others in wild spaces—both human and non-human. Wilderness offers a particular ‘holding environment’ and freedom of expression that allows for small group bonding and conversations that are ‘deep and full’ with like-minded individuals. Granite describes, for instance,

“Yeah I’ve gone hiking with friends or backpacking with friends and just the kind of conversations we have are so much deeper—even a couple of summers ago I was in the Anaconda Pintlers and this guy who was hiking from Mexico to Canada. I just happened to run into him and we stopped and talked on the trail for about a half hour and it was great. And that—I wouldn’t stop and talk to somebody on the street you know about their experience. But it was more experiential than this...informational I guess I would say” (Granite, 2010).

Participants also are able to go with a ‘chosen group’. SC describes traveling in wild places with like-minded people as a ‘weightless’ type of feeling and an intense focus on the moment at hand. She says,

“And also it depends on if I’m alone or if with I’m people I get different feelings. You know like some people aren’t so keen on exactly what’s going on because there’s a lot going on out there. They just aren’t like in-tune with it. And so like when I’m with them out there it’s a little different. But when I’m with people that are really into it I get this whole entirely different feeling. (I: How would you describe that feeling?) I don’t know. Um. Kind of weightless maybe. Like there’s nothing else. And there’s nowhere else that I need to be except for right there and right at that time. And nothing else I need to be doing. You know I’m not thinking about like work or anything like that” (SC, 2010).

Similarly, Granite describes this intensity of sharing experience and space in wild places that is simultaneously about getting away from people (privacy) and bonding with people (special friends). She says,

“All that stuff draws me to it. Um . . . Opportunity for a special day with a friend draws me to it. The intensity that it allows and the seclusion that it allows. Maybe privacy is

more of the word than seclusion. (I: yeah, privacy from...what would you?) Just people really (I: from people, yeah) Not that I would be doing anything that I wouldn't do somewhere else. But there's something about just that it's more of a holding environment that allows for certain levels of communication" (Granite, 2010).

In addition, sharing space with or catching a glimpse of a wild animal makes people feel connected to other animals as animals. For instance, when I ask Sage what resonates with her when she thinks of physical immersion and wildness, she responds:

"Um—uh—the light, wonder, awe, uh curiosity, um magic. (I: Can you tell me a little bit about magic? How would you describe that feeling or that experience?) The feeling of magic? (Chuckles) (I: Yeah) . . . (Pause) . . . (I: Granted it's a hard one to describe) Yeah it is—and I keep thinking of there's an Annie Dillard short story that I don't remember the title of it. But it's all about this interaction—this eye contact she had with a, I think it was a squirrel or something about that size and level of threat. But um so the magic is about like—the magic is about those moments of connection and whether it's across species or you know between me and a squirrel, between me and a tree. I don't know—it's very artistic in some ways. It's an opening to sort of synchronicity and possibility. Ah that is not intellectual experience" (Sage, 2010).

Likewise, when I ask what type of bodily experience Zara might be seeking in wilderness she describes trying to blend into a wilderness environment:

"Again I think I try to lose myself you know. And when I say lose myself. I'm not in any sort of any identity crisis by any means. But it's just that overwhelming feeling of shedding—how can I put this? Shedding all your social stigmas of who you are and what you are and just blending—just being a part of what we all used to be that we've all lost touch with. You know to me I think one of the coolest things is I had this experience a couple months ago up in the Rattlesnake after I first moved here. And when I walk, I walk quietly for the most part. And you know sneak up on animals type stuff. I had this really cool experience with this great horned owl. And uh you know it was one of those I was totally still and motionless for like half an hour and because I was able to kind of blend into that environment so to speak I had the opportunity to sit within like 15 feet and watch this cool creature. You know for that amount of time and that was kinda neat. So to me when I lose myself it's more like losing and shedding everything that the city has and all your social stigmas and stuff and just trying to blend" (Zara, 2010).

Similarly, Raven describes how she feels connected to birds not just because of their movement but also because of the message that their movement carries. She says,

“So, Terry Tempest Williams—again. She writes . . . she has this great line that ‘I pray to the birds. I pray to the birds because I believe they will carry the message of my heart upward. I pray to them because they remind me of what I love rather than what I fear. And at the end of my prayers they teach me how to listen.’ I think for me, birds are that. And they also have just brought such crazy wild joy. Like it's what I look forward to most in Spring—is the spring migration because it is that kind of . . . I bird usually better by ear than by sight . . . and just being, I guess again just makes me feel connected because of their movement and because of their—probably because of their movement (Raven, 2010)

Part of connecting to others in wild places is also about helping and relying on others physically, mentally, and emotionally. Dover shares a story about connecting with a friend by expressing her emotional and physical strength. This expression demonstrates not just self-reliance but physical reliance on other people and the expression of physicality in a relationship. Dover recalls this story:

“Yeah. Um two years ago I hiked about a half of the John Muir trail in California and um it—I really really felt um physically good doing that. I had prepared well in terms of I you know I am a runner so I had that, but I had also spent some time you know with a pack full of books hiking around you know at home. And I spent some time out in Colorado doing some you know really long hikes—so I felt like I was really trying to get myself in a place where um I was going to feel good physically. And I did. I felt great. Um. In fact one of the—well I went with two different kind of bunches of people. There were two of us that did the whole thing, but there were some people with us the first 8 days and then they left and then another group came in the 2nd 8 days. But the first group—a woman—a person I've know for a long long time who had cancer. She had—she was in remission and she'd been you know over the surgery and all that for about 3 years, but she had no idea how weak she was. And so I would um—there was lots of I don't know how much you know about the John Muir trail, but it's really a series of passes. I mean practically every day you're going up a pass and then you go back down again for 4,000 feet and then you go back up again. Anyway, she really was struggling—so I would go to the top of the pass and drop my pack and then walk back and meet her wherever she was and carry her pack back up the pass again. So I did that—for about 4 or 5 different days. And I felt great. I mean I really felt good. There was one day that by the end of the day I was really I just was exhausted, but by and large I felt great. And I guess that was really um memorable for me because first of all because I could do it and then second of all because I could help her. And I think her experience was far far greater—better—because I was able to help. And she was not reluctant at all to let me do it” (Dover, 2010).

Participants also connect with other people through activism where the merging of ideas and bodies in wild spaces cultivate deep connections with other people and land. Pintler describes, for example:

“Well when I was an activist it was really cool ‘cause um the Earth First! activism there was not just protected wild areas, but gender issues, so you know oppression of women, queers, you know and there was a whole bunch of wild people from all over that really balanced some, not all, but many understood feminism, queer issues bla bla. So, um I felt like there was a merging of how we felt about our bodies and wilderness and demanding that us women be respected even if our bodies aren't perfect and um so we did a lot of things that it would be kinda fun to do in city life. Like protecting wilderness entailed chaining ourselves to bulldozers and you know removing the roads ourselves that were being built. Be kind of fun to do that here in city life . . . I felt so good about my body when I was digging a ditch with a bunch of other people one night. It was to prevent the loggers from driving in. And I totally hurt myself, but it felt so good. I felt so you know all night we were swinging that pick-axe. And so I was protecting the wilderness and I felt so good about myself and . . . I was able to be doing something or running through the woods carrying a bunch of supplies for the tree-sitters at night” (Pintler, 2010).

SC describes connecting with others through activism (‘civil activism’) on the Navajo

Reservation:

“We were just with a bunch of elders. We actually went to cook for them. We were there for an anti-coal campaign. We were cooking for a bunch of supporters. Just a bunch of punk kids like us. And so everyone there was pretty like-minded so it was pretty easy to just be doing what we were doing out there without any outside afflictions if you will” (SC, 2010).

4.4. Connecting with the past

Interviewees also experience feelings of connection with the past—with the geologic past and/or with the way humans used to ‘be’ in the past. Zara describes connections with the past through some of her stories in Alaska. She says,

“The farther north you went—the farther back in time. It was like you were on this time scale back in geology. I mean when you got up to a, you know Tok, Alaska, was the part that kinda changed my viewpoint. You see the mountains and stuff up there—or northern

British Columbia—the very northern part of the Rocky Mountains. It looks as if it would of at the end of the last ice age. So I mean you're stepping back not just a hundred years 200 years—you're going back you know thousands of years and then pretty soon you're to the point where wow—this is what the lower 48 would have looked like 14,000 years ago in the grips of the last ice age. And you know so when I'm up in the mountains here and I see like an alluvial fan spread out you know it's all covered—it's got soil—you can't even hardly tell—most people don't notice 'em. Up there it was just obvious. I mean there was caribou on these alluvial fans which basically was just like scree at that point 'cause there wasn't even any soil. And then you know you saw the huge side and lateral moraines from the glaciers—where the glaciers were retreating. So I think that was a change for me 'cause not only was that like pure wilderness but that was like stepping back a long time. So that was kind of a mind trip” (Zara, 2010).

Raven describes connecting with the past through connections with animal-self:

“I'd say that wild places teach me—um something about time, something about the kind of this like evolutionary time scale that I do have something in common with both like previous people, but also just this kind of connectedness to other mammals. (smiles) Which I frequently am not really fond of mammalian functions...so um...I think....makes me more at ease or more comfortable. (I: What's the mammalian functions....like reproduction?) . . . Nursing, menstruation, yeah—just sort of the whole reproductive like thing I guess” (Raven, 2010).

4.5 Connection with something bigger: ecosystem, place, landscape, planet, and universe

Interviewees often express connections to ‘something bigger’ when they are in wilderness. This seems to stem from being close to natural processes (beauty, awe), perspective changes (‘feeling small’), feeling vulnerable, feeling whole (spiritual renewal), and self-reflection. Sharrel shares how ‘feeling smaller’ helps her connect to ‘something bigger’:

“Sure. It's kind of—well it's more special because you have this. I guess it makes me feel smaller. And it reminds me that I'm just one little piece in this big huge world and it even kind of is a combination of awe and amazement and just a little bit of fear—knowing that um I'm not completely in control in a wilderness setting. So—it's exciting and at the same time it's refreshing because it's nice to be able to experience those feelings of being outdoors in nature and not having the distractions and modern conveniences that people have” (Sharrel, 2010).

Granite expresses these feelings of ‘connecting to everything’ after a certain number of days in the wilderness. She says,

“You know with that I think there's something about nature makes me more reflective. There's time to reflect, that feeling of connectedness with everything. There's that slowing down, that mindfulness that comes with it, the relaxation, like I say after about 3 days or so there's just a sinking into a whole different mind space that seems to me more real in a lot of ways than the business of day to day stuff” (Granite, 2010)

Zara describes connecting to something bigger through changing perspective, closeness to natural processes, and vulnerability:

“To me—it's an opportunity to get lost and find yourself consistently. (I: Can you tell me a little bit about that process—getting lost and finding yourself? What that means?) I think that uh you know obviously—hopefully one doesn't truly get lost in the sense of having no clue where they're at. It would be a different terminology. It would be like getting rid of the technology and everything in today's life and going back to more simple time. Kinda going back to basics really. I mean you realize at that point you're not the top of the food chain. Your perspectives change and you're part of the grand scheme—the whole picture. And so really it's just getting away from everything that we know as modern society today. I: What types of ...help you do that?) Things like—well I fish a lot. Just connecting. I mean I tie my own flies and if you can catch a fish on a fly that you've tied you know that's kinda of a connection. I do a lot of photography, still life photography and landscape. So it might be something as simple as your timing was absolutely perfect on a sunrise coming up over a lake—the reflection. There's just so many different ways. You know you may stumble upon a herd of big horn sheep you know and be able to sneak up and watch 'em for an hour. I mean there's so many different ways that I've found to connect up there. And to me that is finding myself in a weird sense” (Zara, 2010).

Pintler says the primary reason she goes to wild places is spiritual renewal. Her story from the Anaconda Pintlers reveals how her connections to place are both spiritual and physical. She says,

“Yeah I was feeling really good about myself and I was just feeling really good. So, I felt awe but I don't know how to describe. Some places I go I feel connected with and some I don't and I don't know how to explain or even really why. But I felt at one with the place. I was aware of dangers. I was climbing up this steep kinda of exposed place and kept feelin I was gonna be blown off the edge. And I really did feel like the place could kill

me easily, but I felt connected and this feeling of excitement both about myself being there and just about the place. I'm like I couldn't tear myself away from it, yeah" (Pintler, 2010).

Additionally, Margret tells how feeling 'connection with everything' relates to her spirituality as well as how working in wilderness has affected her ability to 'tap into' these connections. She says,

"I guess I feel connected to like everything—so when I talk about the universe you know people talk about god a lot. Like believing in god and for me god is just this universal energy that flows through all things and like I mean god is everywhere, it's in everything. And it's not a person and I don't feel the need to personify it. But when I'm in wilderness and I'm around all these like really miraculous things I get that feeling of god. And sometimes I get it too with human creations. Like there are some bridges I've seen or rock walls actually headed into NY city. I can't remember what highway but there were these rock walls that were built I think by the C's—that just blow my mind every time I see them. But there is this sense that I get in wilderness of being part of something bigger. Bigger system or bigger energy. And actually it's something that I have not been practicing in my wilderness experiences in recent years and I need to get tapped into again. (I: Do you think that's because of work vs. recreation or?) Yeah. I don't get to play enough in wilderness. It's like I can't even go in them anymore. I see like trails...I know I know—it's like oh god look at how close they cut that tree to the trail and . . ." (Margret, 2010).

When asked what wilderness means to her, Ouzel responds with a story that weaves together both spiritual and ecological connection. She says,

"My spirituality is really really interlocked and woven through my connection with the wild world. And so it feels like a pretty essential source of power and renewal and coming home. A place where I can kind of remember where I belong in the great cosmic web of existence. It's invaluable for giving me a sense of humility and perspective. . . The sense that like I think that the way humans and our amazing brains and our consciousness and our technology have really unfortunately created ways for us to feel separate from the rest of the world. Separate from the natural world. Like there's us and then there's animals. You know for me wilderness and returning to it helps me remember that I'm not separate. You know sometimes there's that sense that humans are a cancer on the planet. That we are bad and we must have come from space 'cause we don't belong here and we're awful. You know I—like the wild reminds me—and this is maybe getting at embodiment, too, you know like as a mammal and a carbon-based life form. I have

things that are in common with other creatures that live here. I'm not an alien life form" (Ouzel, 2010).

4.6 Wholeness/Integration

"I've learned a lot about myself, the world, the universe, and everything in it—so to speak" ~ Zara, 2010.

"Yeah well like physical fitness is important to me. But there's something else, too though. It's like um there's something about that feeling I mean that feeling of connectedness. That was really important for me at that time. Where I don't think—I think I would have had a much different life if I wasn't, if I wasn't living half of it in wilderness" ~ MSU, 2010

In wild places, interviewees experience feelings of wholeness and integration of 1) their body, mind, and spirit and 2) between themselves and everything around them. As Sage notes, wild places are essential for the 'health and wholeness' of ourselves and for the planet because "where the natural order is still intact . . . they still contain all the possibilities of the universe in that wild place . . . so it's healthy for the planet. It's healthy for me whenever I get to be in a place like that because it connects me to that same sense of potentiality within myself" (Sage, 2010). A quote from Sasha, although used previously also describes the wholeness/integration found in wilderness experiences; she says, for example, "And just I think being in wilderness or even just being up Pattee Canyon or somewhere can just kinda help you realize your shit is not really that important and that there's something bigger out there and um I guess I don't know it just helps me feel more connected to my own body and to my own self, my inner self" (Sasha, 2010). This sense of wholeness is rooted in the connections described above (with self, others, and planet) and these connections are made possible because of both the distinctness of the wilderness setting and the willingness of these individuals to participate in this connection. Sharrel shares her curiosity in seeking wholeness wild places:

“Sometimes I wonder if I'm strong enough and it kinda makes me think about—I guess just kinda think about the life cycle and you know being in wilderness you see things growing all around you. And you see or you hear animals depending on what the time of the year it is and what season. And so you start to think about how or yeah or I guess how you're supposed to fit into the whole picture” (Sharrel, 2010).

This integration and wholeness is often voiced as enriching and inspiring as people make profound connections with themselves, with others, and with landscape. MSU describes, for example,

“I think part of it was just the . . . that I felt like it gave my life this sort of richness and that it gave me this like really immediate goal. You know it's like get through the day . . . or like get to the top of that mountain or go see this new territory or this you know this new area . . . Figure out how to get through 68 hours of straight rain (laughing) (I: without crying...) . . . without just like wanting to go home. So, I think it was the challenge honestly. The physical . . . maybe it's the physical challenge and maybe something spiritual too. (I: what types of spiritual things?) See that's the thing I can't really explain it. It's just something I knew was there you know. Just like that it was like enriching I guess. Like the people I was there with were enriching me and like just being out there in the land and getting to sit and stare at beautiful things while I ate dinner. And you know like even waking up in the middle of the night to take a . . . to go pee was like this amazing thing in Alaska especially in the summer. The colors in the sky with the weird angles of the sun. Just to see that was just, it was just amazing” (MSU, 2010).

Eva describes how direct bodily engagement in nature (nakedness in water) can lead to feelings of wholeness, belonging, and a feeling of something that is ‘right’. Again, there is challenge and risk in wilderness but there is also a certain type of ‘holding environment’ that allows for feelings of comfort and connection. She tells a story of soaking in hot springs:

“I think it's just that without the clothes it's just me. You know the clothes are almost like a mask. I mean they are very useful. You know you need them. You know your backpack would certainly chafe up your back without a shirt and certainly there's the social norms and everything. But there is something that just feels whole and right about not having anything on in a pool of water that comes out of the mountain and it's hot all by itself (chuckles). It's just some kind of miraculousness to it you know like a miraculous ah quality—where the whole. You know I just feel like more like I belong to the planet more than that nature is a challenge to me you know apart from me. Like I actually feel like I belong. Kind of a sense of belonging. And a just kind of sense of that's just the way things are. And we have gotten so far away from it you know whether right or wrong or whether we've taken the wrong turns a million times you know in our civilization. Just you know but just that feeling of wow this is right. This is right. This is the way and what

a great you know what a great moment because nature very often is laying oh it's so hard going sideways and your tents leaking and you're still slow on a trail that you didn't expect. You know there's that part of nature, too, that's really challenging. But boy when it's comfortable like that and you can just shed your clothes and just chill out—ah there's just something about that—just right” (Eva, 2010).

Eva also explains why she thinks this integration and wholeness is essential for human beings through a personal family story. At the time of our interview, she was in the process of securing family property in the Mediterranean—a piece of wild land that was invaluable to her as a child in forming her relationship with nature. More than anything she wants to secure this wild place for her nieces and nephews. I asked her what she thought those types of experiences in wild places would cultivate for young people or what they would cultivate for her nieces and nephews. She responds:

“I think it's gonna make feel more connected to the planet, to the natural environment and it's funny that we call it nature now ‘cause we're so disconnected from you know outside—not inside the house. But I think we really get a feeling—first of all it's just amazing for your health you know just being out there and feeling confident in your own body and comfort in your own skin. Um I think it's such a fundamental—it's such an important fundamental thing to have in a human being and that it would be beneficial for them in the rest of their days in the concrete jungle. Knowing that it's out there and having that interaction—I think it's just so basically—it's important in such a fundamental way” (Eva, 2010).

5.0 Wilderness as a Refuge

“While much has been made of the human alienation from nature and from wilderness in the context of Western industrialized culture, the term human implies that alienation affects all persons inhabiting Western culture in the same way. However, as socialist feminists have repeatedly observed, it is neither accurate nor theoretically helpful to refer to ‘human’ experiences without considering the ways that race, class, gender, and sexuality shape those experiences” ~ Greta Gaard, 1997a: 7

‘*Refuge from normative gender*’ explains a nuanced account of ‘belonging’ by looking at gender in wild places and how and when wilderness offers protection from predatory forces of

oppression. Thus, in order to understand how interviewees experience wilderness as refuge, we must understand how they experience gender in wilderness. Equally, in order to understand gender in wilderness in this sample, we must understand refuge in wilderness. Part of this process also includes understanding how participants construct and express their genders (*gender identity: 'locating the self'*) as well as what type of opposition or challenges they may face in society concerning this part of their identity.

Truly, I think this is one of the more novel findings because it is so nuanced and because I believe this category/concept emerged, in part, as a result of the sample population. In this research, I use the term *queer* to connote non-heteronormative—a term used by many in lieu of or in addition to gay, lesbian, or bisexual labels. Queer, as generally defined in queer theory, also signifies the critical approach to and social construction of gender and sexual identities (i.e. rather than a natural vs. unnatural argument). Furthermore, I chose the sample population gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer not because I believe they share *the same experiences* but because I felt they often had unique and diverse experiences and perceptions relating to gender. In particular, those experiences involve confronting discrimination and negotiating and navigating gender (and sometimes sexuality) in different sub-cultural contexts. I didn't, however, anticipate this particular finding—which makes it all the more exciting. Part of developing this theme involved implementing the strategies of theoretical sampling in order to gain a sense of why people need a refuge and what they need a refuge from as well as what it is about wilderness that support or allow these feelings of refuge and safety. Is it just the absence of people or is there something else? How does the presence or absence of people change how we experience 'wilderness as a refuge from normative gender'?

In order to answer these questions—I first looked at how interviewees conceive of and experience gender. Next, I provide an account of ‘gender in wilderness’ that emerged from the data, a kind of gendered landscape. Then I move onto describing how wild places are a refuge from normative gender.

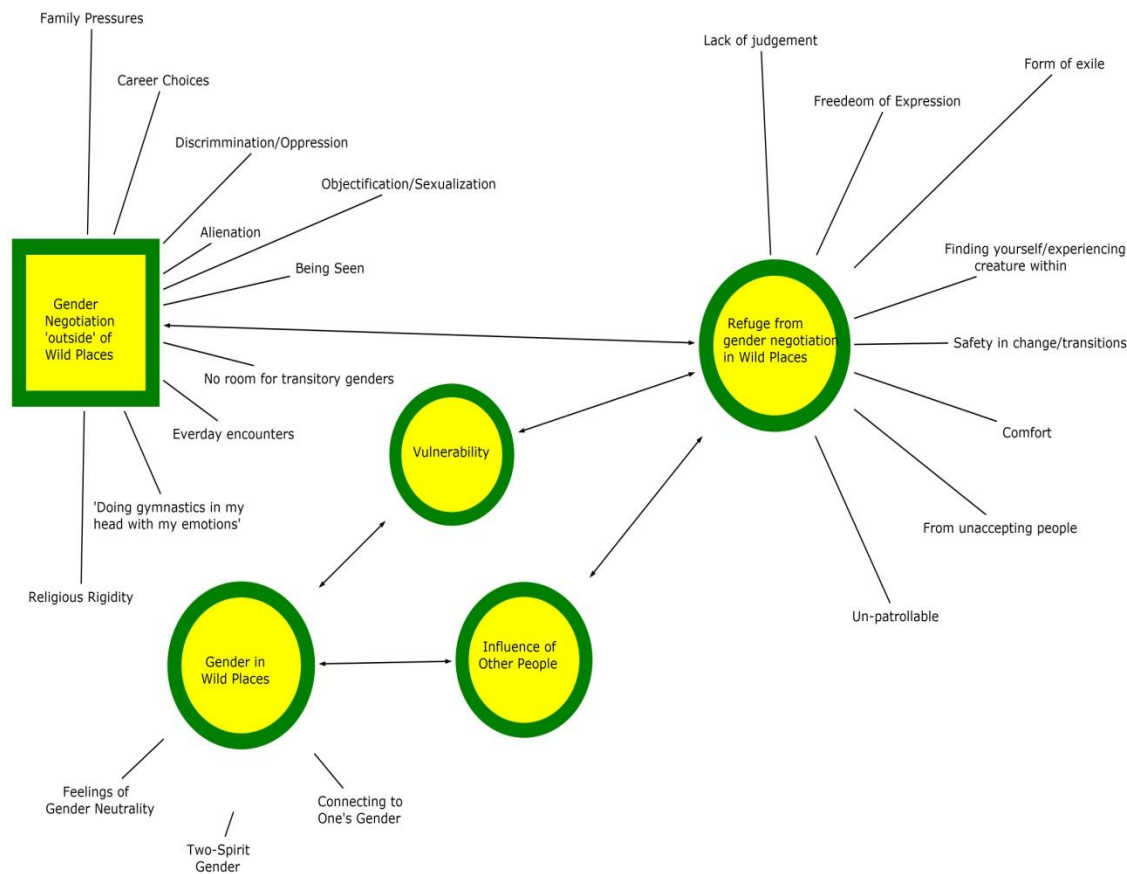


Figure 6: Overview of Wilderness as a refuge from normative gender

5.1 Gender identity

“As my answer to the previous question. Again I don't have—I don't really know how to do that either. I mean it seems like one thing about identity is that one of the ways that you're supposed to know that you have it is because you recognize something outside of you and it feels familiar, right?” ~ July, 2010

Part of ‘locating the self’ includes gender identity and expression, experiences of discrimination, and gender negotiation in society. As mentioned in the introduction to the category ‘locating the self’, these concepts are particularly important for understanding how interviewees experience wilderness as a refuge (from normative gender specifically).

Interviewees conceive of gender, and thus their own gender identity, in diverse ways (See table 3). Therefore—a nuanced understanding of this diversity will be discussed before looking at gender in wilderness. What is at the root of this diversity is whether or not individuals make separations between sex, gender, and sexuality. In order not to impose my own theoretical distinctions between the three—I asked each interviewee to describe their gender identity and then followed that description with probes concerning gender expression. Overall, respondents view gender identity in the following ways: 1) gender and sex are the same in that gender is a reflection of biology, 2) gender is a sociological construct and sex is biological, 3) gender identity is flexible and/or not fixed, and 4) gender includes sex and sexual orientation (i.e. female and lesbian). Thus, we see a diverse range of gender identities but we also see that most participants view gender as something flexible and as sociologically informed. Viewing gender in this way also reveals how and why participants might experience wilderness as a refuge from normative gender.

In this data sample, participants were asked to describe how they express their gender. It’s important to note here that a number of participants had difficulty articulating how they express their gender either because they 1) were unsure what I was asking, 2) hadn’t thought a lot about gender expression, or 3) didn’t worry about it because they are who they are. SC says, for example,

“I don't know. I'm pretty androgynous. I guess like outwardly—maybe people see me and think oh she's gay. But maybe not . . . But like really you have no idea. I was actually just talking with someone this morning about fitting the stereotypes and not fitting the stereotypes of being gay. It got down to the point where we were like well when we're really drunk we do that like gay man hand thing. [I: Hey (doing the gay man hand thing)] . . . Yeah. Like constantly walking around like that. It's like. I do. I don't know. It's not really an issue for me. Like I'm not so concerned about like expressing my gender because it's just who I am and who I've always been and something that's not even a big deal anymore you know. Or just something I'm totally comfortable with” (SC, 2010).

The data does show that participants express their genders in a variety of ways including performance, physicality, personality, behavior, being seen, career paths/choices, physical appearance, and clothing. MSU describes how he's experienced a range of gender expression in both performance and day-to-day expression.

“So I strongly identified as a woman up until ****. Then I went through like a year of being . . . well I can't say, yeah I don't know there was a couple years of like gender queer up in there somewhere for a few years. And then I transitioned in ****. And that wasn't like black and white either. So I guess that trans means that I've lived this sort of range of gender expression. You know from woman to male to drag king, everything in between. [I: yeah. so can you tell me what types of ways you express that gender outwardly...or those genders?] . . . um. Well like when I transitioned I got like really excited (laughs) really for the first time about—like being able to live full time as a man. Um. And uh I definitely like got my hair cut a lot and bought a lot of new clothes. And I was just like really excited about this sort of stereotypical (laughing) male image I was building for myself. Um. And I think before I transitioned, um, I did a lot of drag shows, I was in a drag troupe, like down in ***** for a while. And um that was [I: drag king or?] . . . yeah I was a drag king and that was more like comedic kind of acting kind of stuff, but that was pretty fun, too” (MSU, 2010).

When asking about resistance—several interviewees related the concept/action to their gender expression. Dover's career choices, for example, tell something about gender expression. She says,

“I think I am assertive, but I think I'm pretty quietly assertive about things. So, that's my form of resistance and it's also to ask, continually ask, just because this is the way it is or appears—is it the way it has to be? Why are we doing this this way or what's going on

here? So—yeah I think I have obviously resisted what the messages were to me certainly growing up. In many ways I have—but in some ways I haven't. You know when I was getting ready to go to college basically—and this is pretty true—if you were a female you could be a nurse or you could be a school teacher. So—I never liked the sight of blood so that was out. So—becoming a school teacher and that was what I was educated to do. And I still am a school teacher—although it's a different kind of thing. And I don't—I think I probably had ability to potentially do something else. But I love what I do and I love the decisions I've made in my life and so in some ways I've—I'm not a nuclear scientist you know or something like that that might be really really much more male thing to do” (Dover, 2010).

Raven sheds light on some aspects of gender expression in relation to personality and professionalism:

“I think I look female. You know that I've ever thought a lot about that either. Um. I guess it would just be in looks and probably in a lot of behaviors—like I tend to be overly apologetic and like defer all those sort of—I can be very passive—all those sorts of...things. Um Well I am certainly more comfortable like dressed as I am which is wool and cotton underneath it. And um like but when I was teaching this morning I felt more of a sense to like present as more female. Like I think if I was male and I went to class like this it would be okay, but I guess as female I feel like I have to um wear maybe like a different bra. Or maybe like a different like those kinds of silky dress pants or the shoes that I'd wear are non-functional. So I guess clothing—I mean tactile—I feel like I'm a very sensual person and the clothes that I'm comfortable in are not usually like blazers and spanx you know or any of that sort of thing” (Raven, 2010).

On dress—Zara explains:

“You know with the dress and clothing again—that's part of the encompassing—this is me and this is a small part of it. But yeah—you will definitely never catch me in heels you know. (Chuckle) You know dresses—I really you know I know dress is a big thing—dress and comfortable shoes with lesbians. It's like the big joke, but I totally fit that category because I'm all about comfort and the clothing needs to fit whatever activity I'm doing” (Zara, 2010).

Embedded in discussions of gender expression were notions of idealized femininity and how participants internalize, reject, and/or negotiate with those ideals. Ouzel says, for example,

“Um. Well I do identify pretty clearly as female . . . Yeah. Yeah. I really love the female body and that hasn't always been the case. I know I took on patriarchy's kind of messages about the imperfections and about I needed to always improve it and make it better and bla bla bla. But that's stuff is pretty far behind me at this point . . . Well that has certainly changed over time. And it's changed—it's kind of changed with my sexual identity. I mean I was straight growing up and I got married and I didn't come out till about 28 . . .

When my daughter was 2, left the marriage. And I'm 47 now. Um. And so you know I've kind of gone through these ways of really expressing—really liking kind of a tomboy as a kid. Um. I wasn't very into dresses as a kid. Um and then—it's funny—when I was with my husband I did this kind of bipolar thing. Where I sometimes liked dressy really femmy and kinda sexy and I also really felt like I had to prove that I was as strong as him and as competent and as tough. And so I could be like really butchy when I was with him, also. Um. When I came out—so I've always kind of played with gender expression I suppose as an adult. Where there's a part of me that really loves—loves not being limited to the cultural definition of what feminine what female looks like. There's a part that loves wearing the ripped up jeans, the leather jacket, big boots, you know ready to kick ass and get stuff done and take no prisoners kinda attitude” (Ouzel, 2010).

Eva also discusses negotiating and ‘performing’ gender through dress and how that plays into self-perception and body image. She recalls:

“So I think I have a really gender neutral . . . I think the more—the better—I think I feel better and worse about myself and my body depending on you know just kind of ups and downs in my life and my physical—you know how much I get out in the wilderness—and how much exercise and how good I feel in my skin. So I think I dress and feel more gender neutral when I'm feeling better about myself because I think that my natural femininity comes out better you know when I'm just more comfortable in my skin. And the worse I feel about myself the more feminine I dress. I think that I socialize with sometimes—I go out—when I go out I often go out to burlesque events where there's this ultra femininity. You know theatrical femininity and then if I'm not feeling very good about myself I feel like I have to crank up my own theatrical femininity. Where I might be moved to wear makeup that I never wear. So yeah the worse I feel about myself—the more feminine I might be. I might have the urge to dress up as. I don't always follow up with the urge but I get the urge. You know I feel—I feel some kind of pressure. And also ‘cause I'm single so I'm still competing sexually out there” (Eva, 2010).

Beatrice describes how her gender expression changed during transitioning and how her outlook on gender was affected by patriarchal conceptions of femininity. She explains:

“What it meant to be feminine. What it meant to be who I wanted to be and since transitioning I've really realized that that imagine I had was really kind of extremely sexist and stereotypical and not really who I am. Hum. ‘Cause I you know for the longest time I dressed really really girly. I wore dresses all the time. And I was just like, “Why in the fuck am I doing this? This doesn't work. Why am I wearing a dress? I wanna go work on a car. This doesn't work!” And I limited myself to a lot of the activities I did partially because I was worried about building muscle and at the same time I was worried about looking to people perhaps saw me or were questioning—looking masculine. I feared masculinity. And so I took—I took the most extreme example of femininity that I could find and I made myself that person for a long time. And it was—well not a long long time

but a fairly significant amount of time. And it was—it was really interesting to see—to see how much I'd changed because I definitely go through phases” (Beatrice, 2010).

As several others voiced, Patsy expresses the drawbacks to ‘female’ clothing in terms of practicality and comfort. She says, for instance,

“I mean. I do know that it pisses me off that female clothes aren't as practical as male clothes. Like why can't we have like deep pockets, too—like this is bullshit? [I: Yeah you get fake pockets, sorry. (Both laugh) That's what we get.] . . . Yeah—like I wanna put a pocket knife in there too. Why are you trying to inhibit my survival?” (Patsy, 2010).

Most participants feel their gender expression/identity is not in line with the normative gender expectations of their biological sex—namely normative femininity for females and/or normative masculinity for males. Some people feel they have flexibility in terms of the expression of their gender while others feel their gender expression is constricted by society's judgments; and thus the variation between respondents in the degree that they experience *gender negotiation* in society. Within these gendered identities we also find tensions between 1) resisting normative gender (something external) vs. 2) expressions of self (something internal). Clearly, we do not exist in a vacuum and an expression of self can rarely just be about expressing what lies within our internal psyches. Sophia-Margeaux describes how both come into play for her:

“Embracing or expressing something felt within rather than reacting to something without . . . I recognize that there is a lot of reacting to...it's just I reject the whole notion because I was born the male sex I have to be this way or this...oh nonsense...no more than a woman has to be this way or that because she was born with the sex of a woman you know a lot of it's just like I'm a man so I have to show myself as...even though inside I was always like ‘I'm not so sure about that' (higher pitched voice). I don't really feel like a man in the ways the other guys act like men and what they seem to be drawn towards and interests and ways of expressing themselves” (Sophia-Margeaux, 2010).

MSU describes some of the gender negotiations he experiences as a transgendered man concerning masculinity as well as those he experienced when he identified as a female who rejected normative femininity:

“Like my experience as a trans man has been like (laughing) like there's all the things that I think I'm doing that are against like what society expects of me, but it's been like such a crazy relief that I don't have to dodge the bullet anymore 'cause I'm just like I feel pretty comfortable being a guy and I just live my life as a guy. But there's all these things that come up that I'm just like more subjectively that I'm just like I don't wanna be a guy like that. (I: like what?) . . . I don't know there's like this boys club. I had no idea that it existed, but there's like boy's club like guys say things to guys that are...awful (both laughing) and so I'm always just like you know I'm working on how to negotiate when these things happen and um so like I'm definitely making a conscious decision about not being a man that does that. And you know all these different things that come up and trying to figure out like how I say like you know that's really messed up that you just said that about that woman . . . yeah you now just like objectifying kind of thing. So like I feel like not feeling the need to amp up my masculinity is something that I'm choosing to do that's outside the social norm, but it's nowhere near as big of a contrast that I had when I was female where I kind of identified as more like alternativy. I don't know, I went through a punk phase and stuff like that. but I always had a crew cut and just like really really refused having anything to do with like normative femininity, you know” (MSU, 2010).

Similarly, July explains negotiating sexism and male privilege after transitioning:

“(I: Do you think of that stuff as negotiating or like do you think as having to negotiate?) I guess I think of it maybe more as like sounding or something you know. Like getting the depths of the water or getting like the echoes off shit. I think of it as like gathering information sort of. Or like gauging. I mean I think negotiating would be what you did after that. But I think it just also just really like I still—I mean this is shitty and there's no good way that I've figured out how to talk about it. But it just—the fucking like male privilege that I'm extended—the white male privilege. Just like really pisses me off and makes me uncomfortable. And I think that I try to use whatever strategies I can to like undo that and make it not happen. I think I never thought that would happen. Like I don't think that I ever foresaw that. Unless I tried not to—I would successfully pass, right, as like a guy. And then when it started happening—I was sort of taken aback and I didn't have a strategy for how to just make that not be true. (I: People treating you differently or?) . . . People. Yeah like you go to the mechanic with your friend and it's her car and they talk to you. You know you go to the hardware store with your boss and she's trying to buy paint, and they talk to you. You know. (I: Shake your hand differently? I don't know—I'm thinking of my experiences) . . . Yeah. Hand squeezing definitely happens like especially if they're like, ooh I bet you're a faggot. Then there's definitely some hand squeezing shit going on. People just making—dudes just going into like horrible this and that about fucking women or about how that girl looks or about some fucking shit off the TV or just like dirty sexist shit all the time. And I mean they prolly like, not more dirty sexist shit I heard from them when they read me as a woman. But it's like the flipside of that. Like instead of it being directed at you as a woman—it's like asking for your complicity as a man . . . And so that I think that I figured out that when it seemed at all safe to do that—like the best instant disabler of that and occasional conversation—

good conversation maker was to be like—you know I was a woman for 28 years, right?” (July, 2010).

Indeed, there are many gender landscapes to traverse; I would argue this makes gender identity and expression all the more complex. The dominant gender norms, for example, within the gay and lesbian community include another set of rules, roles, and expectations for people to fill or fit into. For example, lesbians are often stereotypically categorized as butch or fem and butch is often seen as more legitimately gay. Lee says, for instance, “I definitely feel like there's quite a few influences even in the gay and lesbian, transsexual transgender culture itself . . . so, it's, I mean it's changing, but eh-wee if you weren't masculine and a lesbian you know you're...people feeling like you were...just experimenting or something” (Lee, 2010). I bring this up because several participants voiced discrimination and gender negotiation within the gay community in regards to these expectations, these sub-cultural gender norms and expectations for lesbians to be butch in order to be the real deal. Sasha states, for example,

“I think lesbians have a hard time with really femmy women. I think it's less so in cities. (I: Tell me about why you think that is?) . . . Um I don't know . . . femmy lesbians. I mean this is just my experience . . . I was kinda out to some friends in *****, but I didn't come out to my family till I had my first girlfriend here. And she was very feminine, too. And we were both sorta new to the whole thing, and we would like go to **** ‘cause we didn't know where else to go. And everyone would be like you aren't gay—you're just bi. Like I mean it was so weird. It was really hard . . . ‘Cause I am so feminine. And it's like well I can't really be gay ‘cause I don't even really like softball . . . (interviewer laughing) and I'm not really that tough. You know I don't. I was on the dance team. So it was just kinda weird and I think that's how gender identity can play into whatever your stereotypes are. So yeah I think just not being believed as being queer or whatever or lesbian. I prefer queer” (Sasha, 2010).

For most interviewees, gender is not just a label, but a position within society as an oppressed minority. Pintler describes, for example,

“Well I identify as a woman, a woman born woman, and ...that's an interesting question ‘cause. (Pause) So what's. I identify as a woman, but what else is that. You mean like what else do I mean by a woman, no, or what do I. I thought that was going to be easy. (Smiles) (Both laugh). So I identify as a woman, but also. But what does gender mean to

me beyond just whether (researcher says identity) I am a woman or man or what like. Like what does that mean? Should I get into that detail? (I: Yeah, if you want to) Well I guess there are just assumptions along with it and dealing with stereotypes from my culture. So, as a woman I know that, um, I'm gonna deal with sexism and negative things like that, but also that I belong to an oppressed minority and that's cool because we can do cool things and everybody has to like it (smiles) (both laugh). Like if we all run around with our shirts off it's much more interesting than when the guys do. (Smiles) That's kind of I guess being gender being woman—that's what it means both as an oppressed minority is both positive and negative” (Pintler, 2010).

Most participants have had experiences of discrimination that are the direct result of their gender identification and/or sexual orientation. Interviewees have experienced this discrimination at work and school, with family and strangers, and in public restrooms and locker rooms. When I asked Granite if she could recall any instances of not complying with the dominant norms and views of this society she says,

“Oh absolutely with being a lesbian . . . that's probably the primary thing. And um. Yeah when I was growing up there was a lot more (pause) what's the word (pause) well it wasn't a good thing. and I remember when I was teaching at the university and I was—I taught PE and I coached volleyball and tennis and one of the women was going to see a psychiatrist that was a tennis player for me. And she was a lesbian. Well, she saw this psychiatrist and the psychiatrist said I'm gonna get rid of that coach—rather than confidentiality and he said you stay away from her because she's queer as a 3 dollar bill (I: right. Both smile a bit) . . . she came and told me and said I was so glad there was somebody here that was you know—so it worked in reverse for him, but scared the wits outta me. You know that somebody was trying to look for things that would get me fired. So—um that was really painful in a lot of ways” (Granite, 2010).

Sophia-Margeaux describes, for example, feelings of shame in her early years of cross-dressing:

“Which means you know if you're imaginative and brave, you can invent your own gender reality. So, why I started at the ripe age of 12 is my earliest memory I don't even know. That's when a lot of kids start experiencing that sexuality. That's the angle or bend mine took. (I: . . . what types of things happened around then...like you kinda started being kinda interested in wearing female clothes...or...what types of things?) . . . yeah. (I: yeah) . . . I knew. I was always attracted to girls. I remember being in kindergarten and*****, having a crush on her. She walked the same route back home that I did to school. Having four sisters there was plenty of girl clothes in the house (laughs) (I: you had four sisters?) . . . yeah (I: ohh) . . . well I had 3 brothers and 4 sisters (I: wow) . . . so there was a whole herd of us . . . that was a challenge to a you know engage in the secretive and and shameful activity in a house full of 10 people (laughs).(I: laughs) . . .

what it resulted in was a lot of sick days in 7th grade. I look back it's like god how did they even pass me. I think I missed like 36 days of school that year. And part of it's just psychic trauma. Like oh my god I've turned out like this I'm weird, I'm queer. Well queer wasn't a word for me at that time just (I: yeah) . . . fearful and shameful about engaging so. (Sigh) so there was a lot of psychosomatic illness that first year. That's what I think it was (I: yeah) . . . point where I got sent to school counselors and they sent me to the mental health professionals and all I did was sit there and cry for an hour 'cause I couldn't talk to anybody about what I was feeling or doing. (Laughs) uhhh. Managed to get on with life in spite of (I: yeah) . . . and being a preacher's kid there was that added (I: oh yeah I forgot about that) . . . was fairly liberal denomination. The only Christian denomination, well one of them. Well more than 20 years ago now they decided that queer people could and should be allowed to be members and pastors in the churches. So, didn't carry a lot of stigma that way but it was there nonetheless. Err" (Sophia-Margeaux, 2010).

5.2 Gender in Wilderness

"So those feel to me like a very masculine approach to a wilderness. (I: Okay) And I mean that in the archetypal sense—not that physically men would say that. But it's a, it's a . . . it's almost feels like an adversarial relationship to wilderness. Yeah—it doesn't really. Those would not be words I would use for my experience . . . So I think those words in addition to the gendered piece sort of create a feeling in me of isolation, you know. If I think of nature as raw or wild—I think of me all by myself against nature and I guess for me a lot of my experience in nature has been breaking that sense of isolation and replacing it with one of connection—which could also be gendered in a way" ~ Sage, 2010

Questions concerning 'gender in wilderness' elicited themes such as: 'influences of biology and/or anatomy'; 'influence of other people'; 'feelings of gender neutrality'; 'gendered bodies in wilderness'; 'two-spirit gender'; 'masculine/feminine energy'; 'connecting to one's gender'; 'gendered language in the culture of wilderness'; and most notably—'vulnerability' and 'refuge from normative gender'.

Most interviewees do not feel that gender is present in wild places. They may speak of 'feelings of gender neutrality' or gender as non-existent. Dover explains:

"So...um but I guess I think that gender is one of the things you don't have to think about that much in the wilderness. And a lot of the trips that I've done have been with only women—so that probably makes gender be less of an issue. But I've gone on several trips

with guys. One person I've—one guy I've went with several times is just such a wonderful human being that it—gender just isn't you know an issue. He kinda gives me a hard time about being stronger than he is which I think that I probably am physically. Which—but I don't know that that's about gender as it's just about how much it matters that one is physically strong. Matters more to me than it does to him. So—um but I also know that I generally on trips feel a lot better physically at least—he's a few years older than I am—but that's not the difference I think. But I think that's what's really great is it kind of strips that away—or at least it has for me and um so I don't think it's present there” (Dover, 2010).

Most interviewees often don't think about their gender unless 1) *people are around* (in-group and/or out-group), 2) *they feel vulnerable in terms of violence and/or rape*, 3) *experience discrimination while working*, or 4) something comes up, for instance, that emphasizes their biological body as a *mammalian female or their anatomy as a biological human female* (In other words—here we're talking about menstruation and having to squat when peeing). Margret exclaims, “Because of things that a female body has to put up with that a male body wouldn't like menstruation in wilderness in the biggest pain in the ass that I can even articulate. Like it's so uncomfortable and it's so annoying and it's so difficult to deal with especially when you're traveling with guys—a bunch of men. So that makes me really aware of being female” (Margret, 2010). Some people, however, experience wild places as way to *connect with their gender* (as female or transgender or as not fixed). This connection may be experienced because 1) they have the freedom to express a gender they feel is stifled in society; 2) they connect to what they feel are the more positive traits of their gender; or 3) they may connect to their gender through their body.

First, the influence of other people is important for understanding gender in wilderness. So, it's not just the presence or proximity of other people but *what kind of people* and whether or not they are 'kindred spirits' or accepting of gender equality and freedom of expression. As

Pintler notes, “I mean once in a while I get some dumb-ass, ‘oh what’s a nice defenseless little girl like you doing in the woods’. I mean, but its, more and more women go alone. It’s not as big a deal. But there is still. Still when I run into other hikers or backpackers it’s rare that there a single woman. And I feel pretty cool about that” (Pintler, 2010). When I asked SC what, besides the absence of people, allows for that sense of gender neutrality, she responds,

“Where it brings everyone to an equal spot? (I: Yeah—that supports that besides the absence of people?) I don't know maybe just like-minded people. Not like delegating male tasks or like you go get the wood or I'll start the fire and you cook. You know. It's just anyone's capable of doing whatever. Maybe that's why I like it out there so much. (I: Why?) Just because you can do whatever you want. I mean you can do whatever you want now or here, whatever. But you maybe you're more susceptible to judgment or something. Not that I would care to be judged but it's unnecessary” (SC, 2010).

Similarly, Dover says,

“Yeah-so it has a lot to do with having people there to remind you of things that maybe you're more gendered. So that's part of it. But I think it's—for me it's just more about the I don't know—the kindred spirits, the like-mindedness, the focus on recognizing it's you and nature and um you know it doesn't make any difference what or how your hair looks. So yeah. I guess I feel that way whether it's a coed group or whether it's an all women group. I guess I don't think of it too much. I guess if I'm with a group that's mixed of males and females and some guy does some stupid thing that makes me feel like he doesn't think that I'm strong enough, I'm gonna call him on it . . . But it's not something I'm really thinking about unless it happens. And so I guess it's just I think for me maybe it all goes away generally. So—or I want it to go away. So it's not something I worry about or think about. I mean I don't think about it much anyway in terms of myself, but I think about it a lot more academically than personally. But I think that just comes with age and time and you know looking back and realizing what's really important. And you know it's not to worry about that—even though we still live in a very gendered society, but I don't think the wilderness is necessarily that gendered” (Dover, 2010).

Again, the presence of other people in one's own party affects whether or not a person notices their gender or feels gendered in wild places. Eleanor describes, for example,

“Yeah it does depend on context but I think that um I don't know I actually I think it might be in wilderness might be the one place where my gender is not present or it's not. I mean obviously there's been situations like, for example, the backpacking trip in Zion where it was like oh it's 'the boys' who are gonna hike ahead. I mean they offered and I was like totally fine with that. I was like I'll chill but it's like why was it the men who had

to go. And there's that but that's also more socially constructed whereas if I'm in the wilderness by myself walking, my gender doesn't come to mind. I feel almost neutral in a sense" (Eleanor, 2010).

In fact, most participants said they travel mostly with same-sex partners or same-sex-groups and/or recall especially fond memories of all-women wilderness trips. Granite describes wild places as a 'favorite place to gather' with female friends. "Maybe it's something about women in the wilderness" says Margret "We're released from having to behave in this polite and demure way or having this social expectation to do that—not that any of us really does. And then put among our own like somewhat misfit kind is...(I: And...we're dangerous) . . And chaos just ensues (laughing). Oh it's so nice." (Margret, 2010). A story told by Beatrice going boating with eight other lesbians demonstrates how the presence of other people in wild places can affirm one's gender identity in terms of a sense of belonging and acceptance from others. She says,

"And one of the really eye opening experiences for me right before I transitioned was I'd just gotten fired, most likely for being gay. My boss was a douche. And I was really in this, I hate my life, I hate the world, I hate everyone around me mood. I was just pissed off at the world. And one of my really good friends who is a big ole lesbian contacted me and she was like, heh so you wanna come camping with us? Like, 'oh okay...suuure, I'll go rafting with you guys'. She's like, 'great, can we borrow your raft?' (I: laughs). 'Okay!' So, hum but what she didn't tell me was that she—I had gotten drunk around her a couple of times and she had realized a lot of my gender issues. And she kinda had a pretty good idea of what was going on before I did really. Before I was willing to accept it. And I went out—I went out and I was like okay so who's all coming and she's like—well it'll be a surprise. Well it was 8 other lesbians . . . And ah yeah . . . it was the first time I let out the fact that I might be trans to anyone. And I let it out and everyone was like, 'oh, well welcome to being a woman sweetie'. (I: Awww. That's sweet) And I was just like, "Wait, what?" And it was so weird 'cause I was totally hitting on a couple of her friends and she turns to me and she's like—aren't you a straight girl (laughing). And I'm like, "I don't know", "I don't know what I am". She's like, "oh, okay". Awww. But it was a really comfortable experience because I just let go of everything. And I was just like—awesome—I can be one of the girls!! And I tend to you know I had a beard at the time (I: laughing) and I definitely was anything but one of the girls . . . And I was really confused. It was interesting because I was like (can't make out what was said here) be a girl that's topless. Well with a bunch of drunk women that didn't last long. And so now—it's 2o'clock in the morning, there's river nearby, it's like—lets go swimming. And I was like okay let me get my shorts. And they were like no you're not—fucking strip your ass down and come with us. Awww. And it was really—it was really kind of an eye opening

experience for me cause I kept—I can be this obviously male person and I can be accepted. I can be accepted for who I was. And then I had to come back to reality and that was—that was—okay great I came back to reality” (Beatrice, 2010).

Another dimension of gender in wilderness, discrimination *while working in wilderness*, may be tied to normative ideas about gender (associations with hyper-masculinity or manhood perhaps) within the culture of wilderness and federal agencies. After Margret had voiced that when working in wilderness she feels “like I’m living out more of this masculine gender experience” I asked her if she thought wilderness was a particularly masculine space or if the way she experienced this masculinity was tied to her body or her work on trail crew. She says,

“Well what I think is really interesting is like—so I think that the wilderness experience and a lot of the expectations that are placed on people through wilderness traveling and things are sort of masculine. Um or and I think that’s how it was conceptualized actually in the wilderness act and I think that it’s part of like you know that whole frontier masculinity bla bla bla. Like that whole triteness. Like as sad as it is I definitely feel like that’s part of our culture and that’s definitely something that I’ve internalized, so that’s probably where that comes from for me. But if I think about it passed that, you know that intuition and that feminine energy that I talked about—it’s sort of like—it’s almost like magic” (Margret, 2010).

When working for federal agencies some participants have experienced or witnessed discrimination and gender negotiations while interacting with people in this work-related culture/wild space. We might then ask, is the importance placed on physical strength (or appearing strong) part of the masculine discourse within wilderness work and travel or just a part of the physicality required in wilderness? MSU recalls, for instance,

“Like on my crews and stuff like that I really. You know there was gendered stuff thrown around, but uh, especially around women's bodies. Like around fire crews and stuff like that. But I never got the blunt end of that stick, because I was really strong . . . other women I was around definitely did, and that was always really interesting for me ‘cause um. you know, uh, it was just it was weird like wow—I’m being treated as like a masculine woman. I was being treated in a much different way than a lot of the women that I worked with who were just as I think equal to the task as anyone there. But I think it was mostly based on appearances. but you know thinking about like the men I was with...I definitely got it easier than them. If there was a task that I honestly couldn't do—

you know like then it was like fine. It was like I never got any flack for it. . . like a lot of the biological men I was with definitely got treated. So I was kinda in this neat little safe zone where I was like this really strong woman so I got out of all the abuse that biological men get and I got out of all the abuse that the more feminine women get, which is sort of interesting (laughs)” (MSU, 2010).

Notions of masculinity and femininity within federal agency culture is not, however, the main focus of this study. But it would indeed be an interesting direction for future research on gender in wild places. More on this will be explained in the discussion section.

In addition, in wild places participants often use and rely on their bodies, and they are in touch with what their body needs. This way of experiencing the body is rather contrary to what a 'female' body is supposed be doing in society. Female bodies are often sexualized and objectified. Pintler describes using her body to protect wilderness as an activist at a time when the liberation of women's bodies were also at the forefront the 80's feminist movement. Through this experience—Pintler ultimately describes connection—to her body, to others, and to wilderness on both an ideological and experiential level. She recalls, for example:

“Well when I was an activist it was really cool ‘cause um the Earth First! activism there was not just protected wild areas, but gender issues, so you know oppression of women, queers, you know and there was a whole bunch of wild people from all over that really balanced some, not all, but many understood feminism, queer issues. So, um I felt like there was a merging of how we felt about our bodies and wilderness and demanding that us women be respected even if our bodies aren't perfect and um so we did a lot of things that it would be kinda fun to do in city life. Like protecting wilderness entailed chaining ourselves to bulldozers and you know removing the roads ourselves that were being built. Be kind of fun to do that here in city life” (Pintler, 2010).

The threat of sexual and/or physical assault is the most frequently mentioned reason for being aware of one's gender in wilderness. This is *gendered vulnerability* and could also be tied to influences of anatomy. Eva expresses the difference between vulnerability as a human animal and vulnerability as a gendered person (female in this case). She says,

“Even though it's physically challenging very often as far as like the traveling into the wilderness and carrying the gear on your back and being concerned. I don't really fear cougar or bear anymore. I more concerned with shielding men who've had too much to drink. I worry more about them” (Eva, 2010).

Similarly, Granite expresses the threat of unsafe men in wilderness:

“Well—I prefer to be with women in wilderness. And um. uh. it depends on men who are there, but like I can usually tell by the dogs that I've had react to ah men who aren't safe—so I feel pretty safe being with the dog” (Granite, 2010).

In fact, Beatrice experienced new found feelings of vulnerability after transitioning. This new vulnerability seems to stem from her notions about feminine/masculine and male/female in that the female body becomes sexualized and vulnerable. Although I used this particular quote earlier to illustrate part of the interview process, I think her statements are also insightful for discussions of gendered vulnerability. She says,

“Now one of the hardest things for me is you know going out with friends and going skinny dipping now. I used to love skinny dipping. I had no problem skinny dipping. I did it all the time. And now it's partial skinny dipping. You know I had no problem taking the top off. It's a little-it's a little weird. After a year and a half of transition—for me to take a top off at a pool or a lake it's like wow—I kinda feel vulnerable. Whereas I always used to swim topless prior to transition. I never wore a top—ever. And suddenly I have this vulnerability when I'm topless. It's just like—oh—this is kind of interesting (Beatrice, 2010).

The sexualization of the female body and the historical and current violence against women is about power and vulnerability. What is interesting in this research is the 'tension' between different types of vulnerability and safety. If we look at the two categories: 'wilderness as a refuge from normative gender' and 'feelings of connection in wilderness'. In both we see predatory people or structures. It's interesting that people seek refuge from a predatorial society in terms of gender rigidity and discrimination based on gender or sexuality, but they do so by making themselves vulnerable to other predators, non-human predators. Essentially, we seek refuge, connection, and a sense of belonging in places where we are vulnerable as human

animals. In wilderness though—it's a different type of vulnerability: one that opens up the potentiality of feeling fully human. We seek connections because we feel alienated from the natural world but we seek these connections in places that are thought to be about solitude and isolation. Again, it's a different type of connection: one that opens up the possibility of feeling like we belong in an ecological system. Most participants may experience solitude in wilderness but it is not the same as isolation or aloneness necessarily. Solitude is more about a state of mind which doesn't necessarily mean being alone but rather being 'alone' with a chosen group or partner. It means not being around crowds, judgments, and noise. Important to this solitude is privacy—which is at the root of refuge because privacy is about freedom from judgment.

Interviewees also feel that wild places help them *connect to their gender* and that wilderness supports both masculine and feminine 'energies' or a 'two-spirit gender' as well as freedom of expression and freedom from judgment. Ouzel explains how she feels connected to her female gender in wilderness through her body and metaphor:

“I think I still feel like a woman when in the wilderness. Um—yeah. And you know when I was talking about the animal sexuality sense of being in the wilderness. I have I mean have a sense of the femaleness of taking it in. you know there's that masculine energy of penetrating. And I don't feel that so much so often when I'm in the wild. That I feel the femaleness of wanting to open myself and take in place. Take in the elements of the wild. And that's not a hundred percent across the board either. 'Cause I can think about times—like when I'm heading to the ***** river which is a great place to soak down in Yellowstone. And I'm driving. So I'm still in my little car, but I'm driving upstream. I'm heading up the hill and I know that I'm heading for this warm little beautiful pool—this hot water. I swear to god I feel like a sperm . . . Like I'm headin for it you know. I'm coming in. So I've had that—that kind of sense also. But more often it's that kind of unfolding and opening” (Ouzel, 2010).

Sage says, for instance,

“Do I feel gendered wilderness? I feel like my body fits really well in wilderness. It works really well. It can do the things I want it to do in that space. Um. And it feels like a place where I can be both strong and reflective at the same time—which are qualities that

I would sort of—you know probably my socialization would say those are masculine and feminine. Um—gendered traits, but it feels like in wilderness—I—my experience will be richest when I have both of those. Ah. So I hadn't really- hadn't really—you know there is less external trappings of gender identity when you're in the wilderness because everybody's wearing polypro you know” (Sage, 2010).

For similar reasons, wilderness is as refuge from un-accepting people, gender negotiation, and pressures to conform to normative gender; in wild places people are able to make deeper connections with themselves and others (connections with kindred spirits; finding the creature within; freedom of gender expression).

5.3 Wilderness as refuge from normative gender

“But when I was, uh, before I transitioned and I was still doing wilderness jobs, I remember like telling my friends about how much I love that kind of work because I would go to work and it was just like this gender free land” ~ MSU, 2010

The word 'refuge' connotes safety and protection, hence protected area. It implies there exists a predator or something predatory that someone needs protection from. It connotes a safe space. In ecology, refuge might refer to a place or situation where an exploited population has some form of protection from their exploiters (predators) as would be the case for most wildlife refuges. Refuge is also another word used for women's shelters. But what and who does wilderness protect? According to legal definitions, wilderness is often understood to protect nature, wildlife, and ecosystems from humans and human objectives such as development and environmental destruction (see Wilderness Act 1964). For example, the Wilderness Act defines wilderness, “In contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape” and

“as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain. An area of wilderness is further defined to mean in this Act an area of underdeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions” (Public Law 88-577: Section 2(c)). The data suggest something a bit different both in terms of how participants define

wilderness (i.e. wildness vs. legal designation) and how people experience wilderness as a refuge *from certain types of people and structures*. Indeed, wilderness as refuge is directly related to the category, 'escaping or getting away' as well as 'awakening the body' and 'feelings of connection'. We can look at 'refuge', 'connection', and 'awakening the body' as several aspects that pull people to wild places and 'escaping' as one aspect that pushes people toward wild places. These 'push' and 'pull' factors, however, do not necessarily represent a causal relationship. In other words, not all people who want to 'escape' society or 'reality' will experience wilderness as refuge from normative gender; nor can we say for sure if they will experience feelings of connection or awakening of the body. What we can say is this: Awakening the body helps people feel connected to their physical environment and to their animal-self and thus to the earth's ecological system. People seek these connections—in part—because they have been alienated from nature in modern America. Ultimately, alienation from nature means alienation from our own nature—from human nature. And, as Greta Gaard has pointed out, “the ‘human’ alienation from ‘nature’, which forms the basis of the master identity and the alienation of Western culture as a whole is experienced quite differently in relation to where each human’s identity is located” (1997a: 9). For some interviewees, for example, wild places become a refuge from predatory religions, un-accepting people, discrimination and oppression, objectification and sexualization, gender negotiation, and rigid and normative gender categories, roles, and expectations (and the inherent stress that comes with this predation). “What it means to me is uh—as a trans person—it's a refuge,” says Sophia-Margeaux,

“Some place I can go in the light of day and not be bothered . . . outside of my own home. (I: Can you tell me a little bit about what types of things, um, you're seeking refuge from I guess. Or—what types of things that bother you that wilderness offers an escape from?) Uh. mor—onic people (both laugh). A good part of it's just that. Getting away from people that are anxious about who and how I am . . . which I have to assume is just everybody. That's just a starting point unless they show and tell me otherwise. I just have to assume they're gonna be bothered. The only place I can go then is into the un-peopled wild places...and uh...and recreate or re-create” (Sophia-Margeaux, 2010).

What is especially interesting, however, is what underlies all of these 'predatory' forces: judgment, surveillance, patrol, and structure (institutional oppression). These concepts also underlie the sub-concepts identified within the category, 'escaping structure' which includes appearances, expectations, time, comfort and convenience, consumerism, infrastructure and development, technology, and people. All of these 'predatory' forces can cause people to feel trapped and mentally fatigued. Indeed, wilderness can be mental and physical recreation. *'Refuge'* in wild places then is very real as some participants find no where else can they experience 'being themselves' without structure, judgment, and patrol.

Thus, the data show that a subset of the sample experience feelings of alienation from other humans (and perhaps from their natures) because they do not fit into a particular gender category. In terms of alienation from other humans, several participants experience constant discrimination based on gender and/or sexual identity and expression. They may feel this with their families, at work, or just walking down the street or into a public restroom. Other broader cultural messages in media, law, religion, and medicine can also add to feelings of alienation. When people don't fit into a 'normal' gender or sexuality category or the one that matches their biological sex—they may often feel alienated or divided between worlds where they are accepted and worlds where they are not (for example: religious/family vs. peer group or society vs. wilderness). Pressure to act a certain way or present a certain way can wear you down or build up rage inside. Many participants find ways to cope with these feelings and/or experiences—by

'creating their own gender realities' and/or or resisting these gender stereotypes in their everyday lives—recreationally and/or professionally.

The category 'wilderness as refuge from normative gender' includes the sub-concepts: 'safety in change'; 'finding yourself'/'experiencing the creature within'; 'freedom of expression'; 'refuge from gender negotiation'; 'influence of other people on how a person experiences wilderness as a refuge'; 'being seen'; 'refuge from un-accepting people'; and 'wilderness as a form of exile'. 'Being seen' (explained as something similar to 'the gaze' in literature review) is one of the main concepts under the category 'refuge from normative gender' and is also central to understanding why participants want to escape appearances and judgments when going to wilderness. Indeed, 'being seen' is fundamental to the meaning of gender in our society as gender, for many people, is an outward expression affirmed, denied, or negotiated with other people. As Simone de Beauvoir points out: "one is not born a woman, but becomes one" (1953: 267). Theoretically, gender is performance (Butler, 1990) and one can only 'perform' for someone else to look at (or perceive/remember someone else looking). 'Being seen' also surfaces in all other major categories: 'locating the self', 'gender in wilderness', 'awakening the body', 'feelings of connection in wild places', and 'vulnerability' (both gendered and as a human animal). 'Being seen' usually involves feelings of surveillance and judgment and may include experiences of discrimination and feelings of objectification/sexualization, shame, negotiation, or alienation. Although things are changing and vary by geographical location—American society still does not have much room for transitory gender categories (except for in the margins) and not fitting neatly into one or the other either by choice or happenstance can compel people to seek spaces and people where they will be 'accepted without judgment'. Wilderness is one of those spaces. Wilderness is safe because it allows 'freedom of expression' and 'safety in change and

transition'. People therefore are able to connect with self and not focus so much on who is watching. They can also connect to the gender they feel is within them, they can express the gender (s) they choose, or they can be free of gender all together. Important here is the ability to choose and this independence/freedom of action is one of the unique opportunities that wilderness affords. The natural world is indifferent to our human constructions of gender (or any other construction for that matter) as Sophia-Margeaux and others point out:

“Well you know get back to the you know the natural world is indifferent to our genders. How I experience it personally by wearing the clothes that are identified with the female gender...and being aware certainly that I am wearing those clothes physically how they feel on me is differently than my guys clothes. And how I look certainly differently. And in that way I experience my gender. Of the female sort. But I’m not informed particularly by uh wilderness itself except as I say it’s a place where I feel free to do so without judgment” (Sophia-Margeaux, 2010).

Why/how then do we feel connected/sense of belonging in wilderness if the 'natural world' is indifferent to our existence? Does connection and belonging imply reciprocity? What is the role of reciprocity in a relationship? This paradox seems to be rooted in the notion that humans feel separate from wild nature. The words ‘feel’ and ‘sense’ both trigger cognitive notions of understanding the sensations our body perceives. But these connections do not have to be verbally or cognitively understood. In fact—they are not. Rather they are felt as an exchange between our bodies with our surroundings. David Abram explains that

“it is a sort of silent conversation that I carry on with things, a continuous dialogue that unfolds far below my verbal awareness—and often, even independent of my verbal awareness . . . as when my legs, hiking, continually attune and adjust themselves to the varying steepness of the mountain slopes behind this house without my verbal consciousness needing to direct those adjustments. Whenever I quiet the persistent chatter of words within my head, I find this silent or wordless dance always already going on—this improvised duet between my animal body and the fluid, breathing landscape that it inhabits” (Abram, 1996: 53).

We might also understand the paradox between the connection we feel in wilderness and the apparent indifference of the wilderness to our existence by focusing *not* on the indifference of

nature to *our existence* but the indifference of nature to *any existence*; it is in this impartiality that we can find belonging and acceptance without judgment.

*Just as the earth is one
Yet produces sprouts according to seeds
Without partiality toward any of them,
So is the Buddha's field of blessings
(Hua-Yen Sutra, 420 CE)*

Wilderness doesn't necessitate that people negotiate their genders because gender is for the most part a sociological concept (for those who experience wilderness as refuge from normative gender and depending on the presence of people). If someone wants to cross-dress in wilderness, they have the freedom to do so without judgment. If someone wants to swim naked, they have the freedom to do so without surveillance. As Sophia-Margeaux points out, "There's no dress code out here. (I: laughs) . . . in fact there's no dress code in the constitution so ya know as a free American here I'm exercising my right to free speech and association. Leave me alone. Uhh. (laughs). But yeah, but if anybody did try anything with me I think I would just go off 44 years of built up, like fuck you attitude, somebody'd get hurt" (Sophia-Margeaux, 2010).

The '*influence of other people*' on a person's ability to experience wilderness as a 'refuge from normative gender' surfaced through the data much like it surfaced in 'gender and wilderness' in general. Under 'influence of people' we find that not only does the presence of people affect how a person experiences wilderness as a refuge (from normative gender) but what seems most salient under 'influence of other people' is what type of people (in-group/out-group/kindred spirit) and the notion of 'being seen'. July says, for example,

"Cause I think about backpacking into undeveloped hot springs and what happens when people fucking show up der . . . I mean it's just always different. But—I mean I was just

thinking. Maybe I'm calling some things wild places that other people wouldn't but pretty much everybody would call hot springs that you found 2 days into the wilderness (both laughing) to be wilderness, right. But that shit—I mean there's likely to be somebody else to come along. But I think that—I mean most of the queers that I know that go to say *****, which is highly trafficked and right off the road, deliberately time it so that they're there on a week day, on a morning, they're not gonna run into to other people you know. So that they can have that feeling of not having to negotiate it like that. But if those people showed up—you know they hop out and put their clothes back on and leave” (July, 2010).

Participants mention other themes such as finding or traveling with 'kindred spirits' in wilderness; the influence of these social interactions are for the most part positive, non-threatening, and do not involve un-accepting people or gender negotiation. Still, others hide from 'being seen' by strangers (out-group) while cross-dressing. Sophia-Margeaux explains,

“So I go into the un-peopled wild landscape here. But still. Especially with the ATVs all over the place now it's just like and they are getting quieter which is even more of a challenge to get...suddenly there is an ATV and that person with a tee shirt staring at me. It's like, oh god, get me outta here (I: laughs) . . . Yeah. I liked it better when they were noisy (laughs). Oh especially if I'm on a road that's beside a creek and that creeks making a lot of noise. That's that's my most anxious time . . . 'cause it's like I'm trying to get from point a to point b and the roads the quickest way and here's this creek and I know there's traffic, especially ATV traffic. I'm just like ehhhh. So, that's part of that embodiment experience. That whole sense of animal awareness where I'm so keyed into the environment. Who's out here and what are they up to besides me? And I'm amazed even that I can smell 'em coming (laughs). But mostly it's um listening, hearing, and listening for. But I've been seen any number of times” (Sophia-Margeaux, 2010).

As mentioned earlier, participants might make sure to stay alert and aware when meeting others on the trail because of their gender as female, lesbian, or ambiguous. 'Being seen' thus has implications for vulnerability, violence, and safety when confronting strangers or men in particular. Those feelings of vulnerability can be heightened when traveling alone (without a dog) in wild places. Several (4) participants do mention that traveling with a canine companion makes them feel safer.

Wilderness as a 'refuge from normative gender' can also manifest as a 'form of exile'; this theme, however, is not mentioned frequently in the data. Nevertheless, this concept seems to imply a certain amount of resignation that society will never accept anything besides a rigid two-gender system, and therefore literally pushes people out of bounds. Although this viewpoint draws distinct lines between peopled and un-peopled landscapes, it also demonstrates how essential wilderness can be for people to cope with this thing we call society.

Clearly, wild places offer a refuge from the judgments and structures that are part of gender in America today. And clearly the presence of people in these wild lands affects how we experience wild places as refuge. What else is distinct about wilderness that allows people to experience wilderness as refuge in this way? "Well there's a way that you watch animals" explains July,

"I mean this is just one thing. But there's a way that you watch animals and they have like a really like have like a stable existence as say a young deer or a blue jay or whatever it is, right? It's not like they're changing from one animal to another all the time but they also—their identity seems almost to be the congealing of everything that's surrounding them into the negative space that their body makes in the middle of that everything. And it seems to—their presentation to the world, their attention, their aspect, and their degree of attention to one another and their degree of attention to you changes by the split second as the stuff around them changes. So in that way there something very dynamic rather than stable about being for them. And I think that being in those places made me be able to think about—I don't know maybe be able to think about 'being' instead of identity" (July, 2010).

Part of refuge in wilderness also includes safety in change and transition. This is part of the dynamic qualities of wildness—where regulation and containment are not what people experience. Beatrice explains:

"Absolutely. I mean wilderness. Wilderness has always been a part of me and I think it will continue to always be a part of me. I don't know really how to explain my relationships with the wilderness but I just I—there's no feeling better than being out. And not even being alone. Just being out in the wilderness away from the constructs of society. Away from this concrete foundation of this is who you're supposed to be. You

know. In the wilderness, in the wilderness for me everything is in flux, everything is in change, everything is constantly changing, growing, evolving, digressing, um, adapting. And really that's kind of who I am. I'm still finding comfort. I'm still changing. I'm still adapting. I'm still finding my identity. And there's very little that I let limit me anymore" (Beatrice, 2010).

In wilderness there are also less distractions and artifices. Sage notes that "The things in an urban environment that are prioritized are like do I look good, am I gonna be read by others in a particular way. So, it feels like in wilderness there's a—ah—the standards are different." (Sage, 2010). Eva says,

"I think it's the lack of distraction. I think it's the no nonsense of survival and quietness my interactions with my surroundings that I just do the necessary and I'm not distracted. You know there nothing I can—the real world—my life is still out there with all its challenges an unresolved issues and everything . . . But I think it's the whole—the whole wrath of all this unnecessary distraction that really—is. But I wouldn't get the same feeling in an empty room at all. So I'm not saying it's the lack of stimulus or anything. Just the nice simplicity. And there's just something about being outdoors. I mean maybe that's the crux of your study you know, "what is it' you know. What is it that gives me that comfortable feeling that I'm right in my skin and I'm right with the planet and I'm so lucky to have survived all these years because we really are kind of a fragile species in a way. You know so I just feel like I'm part of a miracle when I'm out there. And I feel like the miracuoulsness of myself. I think that you know another thing that I don't take my existence for granted because I have time to be aware of it" (Eva, 2010).

Focus on survival and/or connection which can lead to getting in touch with yourself beyond how you express yourself through your gender in society. "It kind of—the socialized cues that we give or try and I guess to sort of project our gender identity—that language gets taken away somewhat in the wilderness," says Sage.

"And so it feels like the expression of gender becomes truer and unique to the individual . . . Like I feel like I get to be in my body as it exist—um, which is different from how the other person who is naked running through the stream besides me is—you know what their body looks like and how they exist. It feels like there is so much room for both of us to be whatever exactly we are at that moment" (Sage, 2010).

6.0 Ecological Belonging: bringing it all together, again

“My refuge exists in my capacity to love. If I can learn to love death then I can begin to find refuge in change” ~ Terry Tempest Williams, 1991: 178

Participants experience a sense of ecological belonging in wild places because the wilderness setting provides opportunities to escape and experience a different physicality and physical connection. They experience internal and external balance and cohesion; they experience wholeness rather than a disconnected self. Participants also find belonging in wild places away from patrol, judgment, and the predatory forces of oppression; they find protection from un-accepting people and the demands of gender conformity. These characteristics of wild land settings allow people to connect with their animal selves and experience vulnerability as part of the food chain. These experiences also make possible feelings of connectedness with self, others, and ‘to everything’. Honestly, I cannot say with certainty that these characteristics of wilderness and/or the themes discussed in this results section *are absolutely necessary* in order to experience a sense ecological belonging; they are, however, what surfaced in the data and they are part of this analytical story-line. Interviewees find ecological belonging because they do belong—they are human-animals.

“So, I think that it’s just true materially that all of us have a kind of ecological belonging to the planet because we are made out of it you know. To like whatever parts of it and it can be easier to think about that after canoeing on a river than if you’re in like some bunch of fucking concrete. But it’s true either place—it’s all the same stuff. And there’s that kind of belonging. That’s really real to me. And I also think that I continue to think of the kind of belonging that I might have in a wild place as being part of the set of responsibilities and responses that I am able to enact appropriately with the things around me” (July, 2010).

Although ‘wilderness’ and ‘society’ are often geographically separate, our ecological belonging remains true. Wild spaces are important (for these interviewees specifically) because they are

one of the only ways to cope with society and because without them we cannot fully ‘be’ in society.

7.0 Building theory and Conclusions

“Theory building is a process of going from raw data, thinking about that raw data, delineating concepts to stand for raw data, then making statements of relationships about those concepts linking them all together into a theoretical whole, and at every step along the way recording analysis in memos” ~ Corbin and Strauss, 2008:106

This results section includes both descriptive and theoretical analysis. Although both of these analytical strategies are interwoven in above portions, I would like to close this section with several theoretical hypotheses derived from the data. Only hypotheses with sufficient data to explain variation and consistency are included. In the sections above the reader will find a nuanced account of each of these hypotheses that are listed below. Those hypotheses include:

- 1) How you experience wilderness as a refuge from normative gender depends on how you negotiate gender in society.
- 2) How you experience wilderness as a refuge from normative gender depends on if you feel your gender and sex are not necessarily the same.
- 3) Part of the value of wilderness is experiencing body without gender (social construction).
- 4) Part of the value of wilderness for women specifically is experiencing body without objectification and sexualization of that body.

These hypotheses are also useful directions for future research and will be explained and explored in more detail in the following discussion chapter. The discussion chapter will also describe the methodological, theoretical, and substantive implications derived from this study.

CHAPTER 5—DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION

Upon close examination of the results from this study, it is clear that the meanings people ascribe to wilderness are more variable than previously considered and that the exploration of gender in wilderness is still incomplete. In this chapter, I first reflect on the *methodological* approaches of this study; I take a critical look particularly at the interview process as it measures up to my initial feminist goals. In this section, I also highlight the rich potential of using meaning-directed models (interpretive frameworks) to ‘measure’ wilderness experiences as well as the importance of incorporating feminist methodologies in the study of wilderness and gender. Next, I engage the results of this study with the *theoretical* perspectives of wilderness, others, and resistance; in doing so I hope to show how this research adds to our contemporary understandings of wilderness. This process certainly generated as many questions as it did answers and thus a number of questions are left unanswered but are included here as suggestions for future theoretical inquiry. Based on the results of this study (ecological belonging, connection, and refuge), I then describe how wilderness (as a place that is both experiential and meaning-laden) offers models for ethical relationships between and among animals and environments rather than encouraging the divide between people and between nature and culture. And finally, I make several *substantive* suggestions for future researchers and recreation educators and managers.

REFLECTIONS ON METHODOLOGY

Meaning-based approaches

T.A. Loeffler (2004) observes that recent qualitative researchers have started to investigate outdoor experiences from the participant point of view. Meaning-based research has shown that part of understanding the significance of wilderness experiences requires that we also understand how the experience fits into the life-worlds of participants. Borrie and Birzell (2001), for example, explain that meaning-based research reveals the role wilderness experiences play in identity construction and sense of place. They point out that “the meaning and significance of the experience is constructed before, during, and after the experience and only has relevance within the overall condition and lifecourse history of the wilderness visitor” (34). For instance, in order to understand wilderness as a refuge from normative gender, one must understand the experiences of discrimination and gender negotiation as they have unfolded over time for wilderness visitors. Meaning-based approaches help us understand wilderness experiences as dynamic, context-dependent, and interactive; they reveal how we make meaning from connections with ourselves and others in the outdoors (Loeffler, 2004). Although this study does not document the multi-phasic nature (dynamic) of wilderness experiences as described in Borrie and Roggenbuck (2001), the results do explain how interactions between and among animal bodies (human and non-human) and their environments lead to experiences of ecological belonging and connection in wilderness settings (context-dependent and interactive). Meaning-based models have the potential then to help us understand human relationships with nature, other humans, and other animals. Capturing these emic perspectives and social and cultural contexts asks us to experiment with new methodologies and interpretive frameworks where we ask participants for their stories and we provide a forum for open and comfortable conversation.

In an effort to expand our understandings of the meanings people ascribe to wild places, this research sought to provide that forum by using in-depth/semi-structured interviewing as a data collection technique. By coupling this technique with explicit feminist methodological commitments and grounded theory analysis, the researcher was able to draw theoretical conclusions from lived experiences; reaffirm several previous research findings; and uncover undocumented understandings of gender and wilderness. For instance, this research approach was able to capture a nuanced understanding of gender beyond that of male and female; the affect of wilderness contexts on how people experience their genders beyond empowerment; and the role wilderness can play during sex/gender transitioning and *gender negotiation* over time. By using a meaning-directed methodology, this research was also able to show how we experience *ecological belonging* through feelings of *connectedness* to our animal-selves and how we experience wilderness as *refuge* from normative gender, sex, and sexuality expectations.

Reflections on interviewing and feminist methodologies

As mentioned in the methodology chapter, this research used a meaning-based approach and employed in-depth/semi-structured interviews specifically because they are consistent with feminist methodological commitments. For example, in-depth interviewing has the potential to 1) critically address the power relations between the researcher and the researched by tackling issues of authority and representation; 2) support dialogue about silenced sexualities and gender-relations 3) foster empowerment through ‘talking’, and 4) encourage the telling of alternative narratives for oppressed groups.

First, I believe the interviewing style was effective in providing a safe space to talk about silenced subject matter such as sexuality and gender issues. I think a part of making that space

safe was disclosing my sexuality and letting the interviewee choose the location of the interview. Based on responses after interviews, I also think the discussions were empowering for several interviewees. Still though—while many interviews felt therapeutic and/or exciting for both parties, I’m not sure that empowerment is the best word to describe most interviews. I really can’t take that much credit. Most interviews seemed more about building solidarity through sharing experiences and knowledge about topics that for both people were interesting and/or significant in our lives (for example: wilderness, oppression, relationship to nature, gender).

Second, the open-ended nature of the interviews did encourage people to tell their stories—and I believe these narratives to be valuable in their own right as well as in our understanding of oppression, gender, and wilderness. In particular, I believe the stories detailing wilderness as a refuge from normative gender expectations, judgments, and negotiations have not yet fully been heard in wilderness research. Although most people told the stories they wanted to tell, sometimes during interviewing participants seemed to be concerned with giving me the information that ‘I wanted’; perhaps they felt a bit hesitant to share what first came to mind or felt that what they were sharing was not the ‘right’ information. For the most part, I wasn’t too concerned with getting off topic because I was mostly interested in going where they wanted to go with the question. To be honest though, at times I did feel some anxiety about straying too far from the topics at hand. I worried that participants wouldn’t understand what I was asking because my questions might be too convoluted or jargony. I worried about not getting novel data. Also, sometimes I worried that we might have disparate views on gender, sex, and sexuality and that I wouldn’t be able to navigate those differences to understand where they were coming from. There were also times that I felt uncomfortable with the subject under discussion or I perceived the interviewee to be uncomfortable or uncertain about questions that I asked. It is here in

particular that power dynamics come into play. For example, what if I should choose to re-direct the conversation because I felt uncomfortable or ask an additional probe because I wasn't satisfied with the first response? Am I making a power move here and do participants have these same opportunities or does my role as the researcher give me this privilege? These are critical questions researchers should ask in social research and they are precisely the types of questions that feminist methodology requires.

Overall, I believe the interviewing done in this study—while not perfect—did reach many of the initial feminist methodological goals. But like anything—this realization is a process that improves with experience, practice, and thoughtfulness. I would argue that in-depth/semi-structured interviewing does offer a way to challenge the traditional one-sided way of constructing knowledge because it strives to include the voices, stories, and perspectives of *Others*. But the interview is not a stand-alone solution. The approach still requires a thoughtful researcher who continually questions the moves she makes before, during, and after the research process.

REFLECTIONS ON WILDERNESS AND OTHERS

Wilderness, Others, and Resistance

As suggested by Birch (1990), Plumwood (1998), and Gaard (1997a)—people experience and define wilderness and alienation from nature in different ways particularly in relation to race, sex, gender, and sexuality. Both Birch and Plumwood draw specific attention to the *resistance* and *subversion* of *Others* through human participation in wilderness. Much of the recent leisure studies research on gender also looks at resistance and leisure as a political act for women

(Henderson and Hickerson, 2007). Scholars have looked at resistance, for example, in terms of resistance to industrial society, patriarchy, the imperium, and heteronormativity. In the results of this study, however, resistance was not reflective of how people described and conceptualized why they recreated in wilderness or how they experienced wild nature. Resistance was seen as something adversarial that pushes back against something else and was considered to be political acts such as those associated with protests or activism as well as subtle daily and personal actions associated with resisting idealized femininity or masculinity. Although not explicitly connected with wilderness, resistance appears to be integral to the identity of gbtq persons as resistance surfaced consistently in terms of living a non-heterosexual life—or living one's life as homosexual, transgendered, or queer despite direct opposition.

To this I might ask—what does it mean to define ourselves and our actions through a lens of resistance; a lens which, until recently, I have embraced wholeheartedly. As Mitch Rose (2002) points out, resistance is always defined as a reaction to something else—namely as an oppositional relationship to a stable powerful center (hegemony, heteropatriarchy and so on). In some ways, this stance reifies the stability (the given) of a powerful center and leaves little room for agency, creativity, and self-definition beyond reactions to (resistance) hegemony. In other words, when you face direct opposition because of the ways you want to live your life (queer for example)—it can become a struggle to sort through ‘that which comes from within’ and ‘that which comes from without’.

Based on the results of this study, the connections between wilderness and resistance were not clearly articulated by interviewees. And while the thought still lingers that there is something subversive to be found in wild places—wilderness does not appear to offer space for women and queers to *resist* hetero-patriarchy so much as it offers space for creative expression

and to experience being without the constructs of gender or experience being without the judgments of others. Perhaps this is a result of language limitations as most connotations of *resistance* signal opposition, confrontation, fighting, struggling, and conflict. Or perhaps resistance did not resonate because most interviewees in this research describe wilderness experiences in terms of connection, integration, belonging, and refuge. Conceptualizing wilderness as both a place to connect and to resist does not on the surface make much sense; the two feelings seem antonymous. It seems to experience both would be to define wilderness as a way or a place to resist society, implying that to connect with nature is to resist society and thus upholding the duality of nature and culture.

But resistance and connection do not have to be oppositional feelings—as I think of how—I am reminded of queers gathering and joining together in a pride parade. In these spaces we find connection with one another through shared sexual dissidence (identity politics perhaps)—but we come together in opposition against silence, against invisibility, against injustice, against oppression. In these spaces and times we are both connecting and resisting. Participation in wildness reminds us of our ecological belonging partly through connecting with our animal selves and through sharing space with other animals and living things. We find belonging because humans are a part of wild nature. To suggest, however, that we need a reminder of our ecological belonging suggest that there is perhaps something missing in our lives or that ‘non-wild’ society isn’t all that it could be. That something that’s missing is clearly something that we search for and that we need—and finding that something often means resisting what the current industrialized society tells us in terms of how we should relate to nature, how we should relate to *Others*, and how we should relate to our own natures. Further, understanding wilderness experiences as refuge, connection, and belonging suggests wilderness

(concept and place) doesn't necessarily contribute to the divide between culture and nature but that in wilderness experiences we can find models for how to live ethically in contemporary society.

Wilderness as Refuge

Understanding wilderness as refuge helps us understand at least one of those ethical models. People who express consistent gender negotiating in society are more likely to experience wilderness as a refuge from the judgments associated with normative gender expectations. Those expectations include acting, interacting, and appearing appropriately male (masculine) or female (feminine) based on external sex characteristics; people confront those expectations with family, friends, strangers, and co-workers and they undoubtedly affect how people experience sense of belonging and connection to themselves and others. Consistent gender negotiating often occurs for people who feel that their sex and gender are not congruent with society's expectations; this seems most apparent for people who self-identify as transgendered or transsexual. Gender negotiating also occurs for people who may not claim a transgendered identity but who may feel resistant to the expectations for women to be appropriately feminine in outward appearance and dress, bodily strength, and career choices. Because normative sexuality is most often defined by sexual acts between persons of the opposite sex—and normative gender is a reflection of those two biological sexes—it follows then that normative gender is also tied to heterosexuality. Thus—persons who do not identify as heterosexual also negotiate the gender expectations associated with compulsory heterosexuality. What underlies these expectations, judgments, and negotiations are oppressive forces that are perpetuated by un-accepting people and exclusionary social structures. People who frequently

experience these judgments and negotiations find refuge in wild places. They find refuge in the absence of social structures, judgments, and expectations. They find refuge in freedom of expression and the acceptance of beings in transition. It's important that our society protect these values and it is here that we can understand how wilderness is useful for 'pushing back against' gender oppression. Although wilderness is not the solution, it helps us to understand what it means to be human. Indeed, the implications of such theoretical conclusions are far-reaching and profound. On the one hand—they tell us the story of a significant but relatively small sub-population of people. On the other hand—they tell us something of what lies beneath one of the most central organizing systems of the human social animal—sex, gender, sexuality, and oppression. The narrative of wilderness as refuge from normative gender reminds us that in wilderness there is a model of emancipation.

If we are to advocate, however, for a non-anthropocentric definition of wilderness—one not based on the absence of people but rather on the presence of nature, as Gaard (1997a) and Plumwood (1998) surely do—then how are we to understand wilderness as a refuge from normative gender? How can we differentiate between the absence of people and the absence of *certain people* (i.e. the wrong sort) as it relates to how *Others* experience wilderness? Perhaps it is not so much about the absence of people as it is the absence of judgment—which is clearly an important meaning attributed to wilderness by transgendered, gay, and/or queer individuals. And is the absence of human judgment particularly significant for those who experience oppression based on gender and sexuality or is it also important for how other oppressed individuals/groups experience wilderness? To be sure—I cannot generalize across all socially oppressed individuals/groups as to how they might experience wild places because people experience oppression in different ways. But perhaps a common underlying premise of oppression is that it

often alienates and excludes people from full participation in society and thus I wonder if the search for refuge, connection, and belonging might be common themes or common links among how *Othered* populations experience wild nature. In fact, I'm inclined to say that the search for refuge, connection, and belonging could be anyone's searching—as it speaks to the human condition in our contemporary society and it speaks to the profoundness of wilderness and what it can teach us.

Gender and the Body in Wilderness

Part of the value of wilderness is also experiencing body without gender (social construction) and part of that value for women specifically is experiencing body without the objectification and sexualization of that body. Experiencing our bodies without the social constructs of gender allows us to connect with our animal selves and thus facilitates feeling more a part of an ecological system. It also allows people to experience their bodies as useful, strong, and competent. With the presence of nature and without surveillance, we are better able to be in our bodies and to feel our bodies moving, sensing, reacting, interacting, engaging, and breathing. These experiences are particularly important for women because many women experience their material bodies (either internally or externally) as sexualized objects. The implications of these theoretical conclusions support the potential of wilderness recreation to provide empowering and liberating experiences for women, particularly in relation to bodily expectations associated with femininity such as frailty, slenderness, and incompetence. Such expectations have profound consequences for women in America today because they contribute to lack of self-confidence,

self-esteem, and sense of competence as well as mental anxieties, eating disorders, self-injuries, and victimization.

Connecting to our animal selves

To be sure—the value of experiencing our material bodies without gender extends beyond women, girls, and females because part of this phenomena results from the distinctiveness of the wilderness setting and is in fact part of a much larger narrative about healing and rebuilding the human-human and the human-nature relationship. Seeing wilderness as necessary to this task, for example is an indictment that a non-wild society is lacking something essential to human existence. Connecting with our bodies can be experienced as connecting with our ‘animal-selves’; and it is this connection that changes the potential for ecological belonging. It is through our material bodies—our animal selves—our wildness—and our vulnerability that we are able to feel a sense of ecological belonging and connection with the natural world. To describe embodiment is to express what is fleshy, alive, material, and sensational. We can make these connections in wilderness because in wilderness we find intact ecosystems with wild landscapes and wild creatures—breathing and pulsating. Here we can see, touch, smell, taste, fear, and love crossing (or not) raging rivers; climbing over mountain passes; finding hidden alpine lakes; hiking on blistering hot south-facing slopes; or ducking from dive-bombing goshawks. Wilderness also requires that we use and depend on the strength, endurance, and adaptability of our bodies for travel and survival. Wilderness experiences can connect us to our own wildness and to what it means to be an animal and live in relation to and be surrounded by ‘other’ bodies who also live, breath, laugh, and make love. These things are important because they help us understand what it means to be fully human. They are necessary also

because they help us understand ourselves as human animals—which is part of repairing our relationships with other humans, with other animals, with wild nature, and with our own wild natures.

Indeed, to lose touch with our material bodies and our wildness is to lose touch with ourselves and our place in this world. In many ways, when we go to wilderness we are like my sad-eyed, house-bound hound-dog. When un-leashed from his chains and set free into the woods the hound immediately sniffs his way back into the familiar. We can watch him as he catches a scent, feels the pulse of the chase run through him, howls in jubilant determination with his fellow canines—and who no doubt feels what it's like to be a 'real' dog again—to be fully engaged in what he *is*—a sensing and active body. Greta Gaard (1997a) suggests that wilderness—because it offers a unique type of physical and perceptual orienteering—reminds us that we are human animals, and that this shift in human identity is critical to repairing the human-nature relationship. I believe the results of this study support this assertion. In wilderness, we experience spatial, visual, olfactory, and auditory shifts that restore our connections to nature. We become more kinesthetically aware of our muscles and our movement. We feel more integrated—physically, mentally, and spiritually. We also feel the threats of predation and of the natural elements; and while we might feel afraid and vulnerable—it is these experiences that are central to understanding ourselves as animals in an expansive ecological system—a system which we can never completely control.

SUBSTANTIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

The results and analysis of this study have both social and practical implications for future researchers, recreation managers, and outdoor educators. At the very least, it is important that managers and educators understand how gender oppression operates and affects people not just in society, but people who could be potential recreational users, co-workers, or students. Wilderness educators and managers could follow the findings of this research by: 1) evaluating how they perpetuate gender stereotypes and gender oppression; 2) understanding how the social positions that people occupy (in relation to sex, gender, sexuality, race, class, etc) affect the meanings people ascribe to wilderness experiences and the role wilderness plays in their lives; and 3) recognizing that wilderness for many people speaks to fundamental ways of being and is sometimes more than just a fun and adventurous trip into the woods; and 4) offering more than just opportunities for GBTLQ people in outdoor leadership but facilitating gender-sensitive leadership training (as suggested in regards to race by Warren, 2002). Research findings also suggest that the *integration* of physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of existence can be important parts of wilderness experiences; educators could perhaps find ways to openly address and facilitate this facet of wilderness in culturally sensitive ways.

Future Research Suggestions

To the best of my knowledge, there is virtually no research that looks at transgendered or transsexual perspectives of wilderness or outdoor education. Additional research from these perspectives could help develop our understanding of wilderness as a refuge from normative gender—an understanding which not only supports the promise of wild places but which also addresses contemporary oppression and discrimination.

This research also suggests that notions of masculinity and femininity within federal agency culture could offer distinct and valuable information on gender and wilderness. This project, for example, focuses primarily on wilderness experiences as recreation. Based on the initial data from this sample—it seems that *working* and *recreating* in wilderness could be distinctly different physical and social experiences. Working on a trail crew, for instance, can be more physically demanding and the opportunities to relax and the freedom to explore so common in recreational wilderness stories are likely to be less pervasive in stories about working. Also, recreating in wilderness typically allows for choosing one's own party—a choice not usually given to those who work in wilderness. The data also indicate that oppressive gender systems are still present within federal agency culture and that the associations between wilderness work and hyper-masculinity still linger. Research that investigates these gender systems could help recreation managers provide equitable gender working environments.

Third, wilderness (concept) has been criticized for upholding the mind/body dualism in part because wilderness has long-standing associations with a pure physical experience. Spirituality, however, has also been associated with wilderness since the Romantic period and recent qualitative research on outdoor experiences point out the need to understand how outdoor experiences facilitate spiritual development (Loeffler, 2004; Stringer and McAvoy, 1992; Smith, 1996). The results from this project overwhelmingly suggest that wilderness experiences allow for mental, physical, and spiritual *integration*. Associated with this integration are feelings of connection and belonging—feelings which may be similar to what Borrie and Roggenbuck (2001) describe as *oneness*. Future research might ask: how this integration occurs; how it is beneficial for overall well-being; how can integration be developed in outdoor programs; and

how can wilderness be used as a model for mental, physical, and spiritual integration in everyday life.

From this research, we can understand that this *integration* is beneficial for many of the participant's overall well-being. These sentiments are clearly articulated by the majority of respondents. But why are they essential to overall well-being? Because integration is part of what reminds us of our ecological belonging? That to feel integrated is to feel human. In looking at the integration of the mental, physical, and spiritual (for many) aspects of being we see that humans are not so easily split apart in the ways that many early Western philosophers described. We integrate because that is what we are—integrated beings and while I do believe that wilderness is magical, we don't simply feel integrated because wilderness wills it so. Wilderness is rather a role-model, an archetype and the data in this research tell us part of the mechanics of how it happens.

Part of those mechanics can be found in the interactions between and among human bodies (awakening of the body) and their surroundings (wilderness settings). As mentioned in the results chapter, the wilderness setting offers opportunities for distinct types of physicalities and physical connections which help awaken the body. Awakening the body can also be described as 'feeling alive' and includes concepts such as 'being in my body' (kinesthetic awareness, being present, emotional responses); 'bodily engagement and sensory perception'; 'wholeness/integration'; 'learning physical abilities'; and 'body as useful'. *'Awakening the body'* explains part of how and why participants are able to feel integrated with their wild surroundings and thus why they feel a sense of belonging in wild places. Additionally, the research shows that part of this integration is about quieting, clearing, or calming the mind while still feeling alert and responsive to surroundings. There is also something in the data that tells us how movement

can be meditative and how the absence of judgment can allow freedom of expression and freedom of movement. Although spiritual aspects of integration were mentioned frequently—finding ways to describe those feelings were difficult for most respondents. This is not surprising—as that which is spiritual is often understood to be indescribable and beyond our capacity to embody those experiences or feelings with language. It’s also interesting to point out, however, that carving up integration into these three parts: mind, body, and spirit could very well subsume or leave out other significant parts of ourselves. Why do we believe that we are made of these three parts in the first place? Where in these divisions, for instance, do we find the parts that are creative, sexual, emotional, intuitive, and sensual in our understandings of integration?

How can integration be developed in outdoor programs? Outdoor educators could follow the results of this study by 1) understanding the importance of freedom of expression and movement for all types of bodies in educational and training settings and 2) recognizing that being outdoors and in wild places is about more than just physical challenge and risk but encompasses a broad range of spiritual and emotional experiences and that these aspects should be validated on par with technical skills.

Looking at how can wilderness be used as a model for mental, physical, and spiritual integration in everyday life—we might begin by looking for spaces, places, or situations that can help facilitate awakening of the body (as described above), where judgment of body is minimal, where gender expectations are neutral, where movement can be meditative, and where the mind can be calmed. That’s a lot to live up to, but I keep coming back to experiences that I’ve had doing *contact improvisation*. Contact has a variety of definitions, forms, and understandings depending upon the practitioner and the community of contacters. In an academic sense—it is the manifestation of the post-modern evolution of dance which started in the early 1970s. But

contact improvisation has been called all sorts of things such as art-sport, folk dance, meditation, therapy, play, and a technique for choreographers (Pallant, 2006: 9). What makes contact compelling is that the form has the potential to break down expectations and barriers associated with gender, race, sex, class, disability, sexuality, and so on. Movements are not rehearsed or choreographed—they are not judged. Movements are spontaneous and improvised. There are no leaders—all humans reacting to varying degrees of touch. Not only does contact facilitate integration—it also speaks to a similar ethical message that we find in wilderness. As Marianne Neuwirth (2009) points out,

“It frames dance as a way of relating to others in general, and the specific script of how to do so is limited only by demonstrating respect, controlling one’s own body, and being clear about one’s intentions. By being mindful of the person or person’s before us, and of the natural entities we encounter, we can respond not in pre-choreographed ways, but in informed yet improvised and unrehearsed ways. This way of relating is more risky and unpredictable, but offers a novel way to encounter others in the world. Similarly, interacting with the natural world in a more spontaneous way as if it were a precious place to us could foster our sense of identification with it, and our sense of being related to it, and our desire to care for it” (28).

Again, I think that the *integration* we experience in wilderness is useful for future researchers to understand other ways that we can facilitate integration in our everyday lives and thus aid in what may be an essential part of human well-being.

CONCLUSIONS

“It also reminds me of an intimate and physical bond of knowledge with the Earth, through a form of conversation with its great, laboriously inscribed body, which can only be entered into through the answering effort of our human bodies as we walk within it” ~ Plumwood, 1998: 653

“This is the longest love affair we humans have ever known, the lifelong intoxication of the senses” ~ Jay Griffiths, 2006:49

Wild places inspire and motivate me to live through my body and to write about and study those experiences. For me most recently, wilderness means hiking over log jams of downed lodgepoles and subalpine firs in thunderstorms with wet boots, broken knees, friction burns, raw toe sores, and rashes—red, red, and soreness everywhere. It is grabbing sharp spruce needles and balancing over jagged staubs that scrap your thighs and crotch. It is cold and wet and to stop for long feels like hypothermia and to *feel with my body* at this moment is to survive and to be alive. Through my body I feel temperature, stamina, ability, and connectedness to the wet thimbleberry that catch and whip at my body. As I dig cat holes I smell moist earth, dirt, roots, decay, and shit. As I walk I smell and spot egg-shaped moose pellet piles, tubes of twisting ungulate hair and bone, bear berry patties, and grainy mule and horse manure. I smell the vanilla in ponderosa pine, ginger root around my tent, rotting mud and logs and water bars, fresh minty feathery yarrow, fish, ammonia, and menstrual blood. I smell wood chips, bark, and hairy heart-rot as we crosscut. I soak it up through my body with love and thankfulness, and I share these experiences with other smiling, aching, and pungent bodies.

This study demonstrates that in wilderness—people are able to experience a profound sense of connection and ecological belonging because they experience themselves as human animals; an experience which awakens one’s sense of vulnerability and humility. It is important that we have these experiences not only because they bring us closer to understanding ourselves,

but also because they bring us closer to understanding the ethical implications of our actions on this planet. We experience connection and belonging, too, because we are wild—in both mind and body—and we are drawn to experiences that remind us of this. David Abram writes that “Ultimately, to acknowledge the life of the body, and to affirm our solidarity with this physical form, is to acknowledge our existence as one of the earth’s animals, and so to remember and rejuvenate the organic basis of our thoughts and our intelligence” (Abrams, 2006: 47). Without judgment and patrol—people also find refuge in wilderness away from the constructs of gender—away from prescribed and idealized ways we use and present our bodies —away from the predatory eyes of oppression. While the lessons wilderness offers may be infinite—from this study we can at least discern that part of repairing the human relationship with nature means repairing our relationship with all *Others* whereby domination is justified through faulty presumptions of moral superiority. Imperative to repairing the human-nature relationship is experiencing ourselves as animals in an ecological system and recognizing the damage caused by the social structures that placate our wildness.

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APPENDIX DESCRIPTION

RECRUITMENT FLYER:	205
This flyer was used to advertise the project. It was hung at local outdoor equipment stores, university departments and gymnasiums, and gbtq community centers.	
LETTER OF CONSENT:	206
All interviewees signed this letter of consent before each interview, allowing the researcher to audio-record and transcribe interviews.	
EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH:	209
All interviewees were given a copy before the interviews as a general explanation of the project.	
EXAMPLE THEORETICAL SAMPLING RECRUITMENT EMAIL:	210
This is an actual email sent to one of the interviewees asking for assistance in recruitment of a particular sub-group within the sample. This is an example of a theoretical sampling strategy.	
EXAMPLE INTERVIEW:	211
This is an actual interview with Sage and is included in the appendix to illustrate the interview process.	
POST LETTER SENT TO INTERVIEWEES ALONG WITH THE RESULTS CHAPTER:	225
This letter was sent to all interviewees (along with the Results Chapter) before publication so they could comment and express any concerns about my interpretations.	

SUBJECT INFORMATION AND INFORMED CONSENT

Title: Embodiment, gender, and wilderness: a feminist phenomenological study of the ‘lived body’, the ‘gendered’ body, and ‘embodied resistance’.

Project Director(s): Angela M. Meyer; Master’s student in department of Society and Conservation/College of Forestry and Conservation at the University of Montana in Missoula, Montana 59812; 406-243-6422.

Faculty supervisor: Dr. Bill Borrie; Professor Park and Recreation Management in the department Society and Conservation/College of Forestry and Conservation at the University of Montana in Missoula, Montana 59812; 406-243-4286.

Special instructions: This consent form may contain words that are new to you. If you read any words that are not clear to you, please ask the person who gave you this form to explain them to you.

Purpose: The purpose of this research study is to learn about and understand the unique ways in which GBTLQ ‘females’ experience embodiment and gender in wilderness. You have been chosen to participate in this study to contribute thoughtful discussion on these topics based on your direct experiences.

Procedures: If you agree to take part in this research study, you will be asked to participate in one informal in-depth interview session which will last for 1-2 hours. This interview session will take place in wilderness settings or in quiet and safe settings such as interviewee homes or in official meeting rooms in the University Center and the Mansfield Library at the University of Montana in Missoula. This interview may take place over the phone if a face-to-face meeting is not feasible. Ultimately, this interview will take place where you feel most comfortable and where adequate audio recording can be done.

Optional: You will also be given the opportunity to participate in one group interview session. These sessions will last for 1-2 hours and will be done in similar settings as the individual interviewees. If you agree to take part in this research study, you are not required to participate in these group interviews. Your participation in group interviews is completely voluntary and participation is open to anyone who participates in the study. Questions asked during group interviews will be formulated as the study progresses and therefore may be different than the questions I asked you during the individual interview. The purpose of these group interviews is to start a dialogue between participants and explore any new themes discussed during individual interviews.

Risks/Discomforts: If you agree to take part in this research study, you should be aware of the possible risks involved in your participation. Possible risks include the disclosure of your sexuality by virtue of participation in this project. Such disclosure could threaten your reputation and cause unwanted social stigma.

To minimize such effects, the researcher and each participant will complete confidentiality agreements and consent forms prior to the beginning the research and interview sessions. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the research study at anytime. In addition, the researcher will not disclose your identity and will use pseudonyms (of your choice) on all documents and publications resulting from this research. The researcher will have only one copy of identification key linking you to the data and this key will be 1) kept at a separate location from the interview data and 2) restricted from use by anyone other than the project director and faculty supervisor.

Benefits: There is no promise that you will receive any benefit from taking part in this study. This study might help further the scientific body of knowledge on gender, embodiment, and

wilderness from GBTLQ perspectives. This study, for instance, may shed light on the diverse ways of knowing and living through our bodies in nature and could make significant contributions to the philosophical and empirical understandings of embodiment, gender, and wilderness.

Confidentiality: Your identity will be kept confidential. Only the researcher and her faculty supervisor will have access to the files. In addition, if the results of this study are written in a scientific journal or presented at a scientific meeting, your name will not be used (pseudonyms will be used). The data will be stored separate from the identification key and from your signed consent form. Audio-taped interviews will be transcribed without any information that could identify you. The tape will then be erased. Confidentiality agreements will also be signed with transcribers.

If you participate in a group interview, the researcher will adhere to the same confidentiality and protection of privacy guidelines as listed for the individual interviews. The researcher, however, cannot control confidentiality on the part of other subjects who also take part in those group interviews. You should be aware that your participation (voluntary and not required to participate in study) in group interviews might pose an additional risk to confidentiality based on the participation of other subjects in these interviews.

LIMITS OF CONFIDENTIALITY: individual interviews

There are conditions under which confidentiality may be breached. If you indicate wanting to harm yourself or someone else, the experimenter will contact you and this informed consent may also be given to a member of the clinical faculty who may contact you. Because of this, we also require that you provide your name and phone number.

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Compensation for Injury: Although we believe that the risk of taking part in this study is minimal, the following liability statement is required in all University of Montana consent forms.

In the event that you are injured as a result of this research you should individually seek appropriate medical treatment. If the injury is caused by the negligence of the University or any of its employees, you may be entitled to reimbursement or compensation pursuant to the Comprehensive State Insurance Plan established by the Department of Administration under the authority of M.C.A., Title 2, Chapter 9. In the event of a claim for such injury, further information may be obtained from the University's Claims representative or University Legal Counsel. (Reviewed by University Legal Counsel, July 6, 1993)

Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal: Your decision to take part in this research study is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to take part in or you may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. You may be asked to leave the study for any of the following reasons:

1. Failure to follow the Project Director's instructions;
2. A serious adverse reaction which may require evaluation;

3. The Project Director thinks it is in the best interest of your health and welfare; or
4. The study is terminated.

Questions: You may wish to discuss this with others before you agree to take part in this study. If you have any questions about the research now or during the study contact: Angela M. Meyer @ 406-243-6422. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Chair of the IRB through The University of Montana Research Office at 243-6670.

Statement of Consent: I have read the above description of this research study. I have been informed of the risks and benefits involved, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. Furthermore, I have been assured that any future questions I may have will also be answered by a member of the research team. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study. I understand I will receive a copy of this consent form.

Printed (Typed) Name of Subject

Subject's Signature

Date

Statement of Consent to be Audio-taped: I consent to being audio recorded. I understand that audio recordings will be destroyed following transcription, and that no identifying information will be included in the transcription.

Subject's Signature

Date

Explanation of the Research: will be given during recruitment when participant has voiced interest in participating in the project, but has not yet signed the consent form. The researcher will provide this explanation in the manner desired by the participant. Depending on what the participant prefers, this explanation will be given via email, USPS mail, or in person.

Project Title: “Embodiment, gender, and wilderness: a feminist phenomenological study of the ‘lived body’, the ‘gendered body’, and ‘embodied resistance’”

Project Objective: The purpose of this research study is to learn about and understand the unique ways in which GBTLQ ‘females’ experience embodiment and gender in wilderness.

Project Methods: These topics will be explored through informal and individual in-depth interviews. These interviews will be 1-2 hours in length. Participants will also be given the option to participate in one group interview which will be 1-2 hours in length.

Hey *****:

How's it going? Decided on where you're headed for PhD? I think I'm going to *****, maybe☺.

Anywho, I have a question for you if you've got time. So, I'm in the thick of data analysis and I keep coming back to the concept as wilderness/wild places as a refuge for people who do a lot of gender negotiating in society. Wilderness as a refuge from judgment, surveillance, 'being seen', un-accepting people, and the social constructions of a two-gender system. Although there are a lot of other exciting things going on in my data—I find this particularly novel and insightful.

So, I think I am again coming back around to the idea that I should interview more people who identify as transgendered as this is where this theme seems to surface most concretely (not always though). I have already completed 19 interviews, so practically speaking—I won't be looking to do too much more. But in any case, if you know of anyone who you think might be helpful—I'd be interested in connecting with them. If not though, of course—no worries. I do have a very rich data set as it stands now. I'm just compelled on this particular point and wanted to send out some emails in case there was an opportunity to learn more on this topic.

Hope you're well and good luck with your studies.

Cheers,

Angie
(phone #)

Sample Interview Transcription

Interview 11: Sage

February 3rd, 2010

Phone interview: 53 minutes

I: Interviewer

R: Respondent

I: Cool. Well I guess my first question for you is if you could tell me how you define wilderness and we can start with that?

R: Okay. Um. Well I am sitting outside so let me know if the wind on the microphone becomes awkward for your listening pleasure.

I: Okay. Sounds good so far.

R: Okay. How do I define wilderness. Um. Ahh. I guess—ahh ahhh—the natural environment where the balance is tipped in favor of nature rather than human impact.

I: Okay

I: And as far as—this is you know still a wilderness question, but maybe it's a little more personal. Could you describe for me what wilderness—and you can you know use wilderness interchangeably with wild places or however you define it. But could you tell me or describe for me what wilderness means to you?

R: Ahh. Um. Ohh—let's see. I guess fundamentally it means health and wholeness to me in that—and that has several different sorts of layers of meaning. So um—it's the health and wholeness of the planet when there are places and preferable the more places the better where—where the natural order is um still intact. And—ahhh that's not just—not just because that's the way it's supposed to be, but it also—the whole sort of wealth of possibility that are more—ah—I don't know that feels . . . feels to me that they're very—I don't wanna use the word divine, but that's sort of what I'm getting at. Like they still contain all the possibilities of the universe in that wild place. So—it's healthy for the planet. It's healthy for me whenever I get to be in a place like that because it connects me to that same sense of potentiality within myself.

I: Yeah. Could we maybe explore—you mentioned um healthy for you because it offers some sort of connection. Could we maybe explore connection and what you feel as though you are connecting to or how you're connecting—through what medium you're connecting?

R: Yeah. So—uh in trying to answer that, but I sort of do a comparison for my urban life vs. my wilderness life. And I think that's the obvious like first place in difference in that there's more connection in the wilderness—hum is through my body. So I feel like on a sensory level—ah there's much more richness for me in a wilderness setting in that it's almost like I get to return to more of my animal nature. Ah. And so I'm not only very aware of things, um, on a sensory level

like you know smell, taste, touch, and you know is it hot, is it cold, is it raining, am I comfortable, and what does all this mean? But I also feel my body; I'm using my body—typically to be able to move through that space. I'm feeding myself. Ah. Because I need to be fed in order to be able to move. Ah. I'm sitting you know under a tree that a squirrel is up in—that same tree. So I'm sharing space with other creatures and so it makes me more aware of my creature-ness and that makes me feel sort of on a par with and therefore connected to all the other sort of living entities that are in that space, too.

I: Yeah.

R: Yeah—so that's my first stab at that answer.

I: Yeah that's—yeah great cause I had a couple questions yeah the physical nature of the experience, but you—you went there anyways so that's great.

(Both chuckle)

I: Um. I guess if you could describe. And we'll probably come back to a couple things you mentioned. But maybe if you could describe for me your most recent wilderness trip? And if you don't have one that's so recent—maybe one that's memorable to you. Just what sorts of feelings stand out or again—the physical or bodily nature of the experience is particularly of interest to me.

(Car alarm going off in background)

R: Um Okay. Let's see. So the most recent isn't necessarily the best example—hum of being embodied in nature. But I'm happy to describe it. And it was a weekend backpacking trip in the Ventana Wilderness down near Big Sur in California. And it was pretty much just a hike in, spend the night, hike back out. It's sufficiently ah untraveled in that we didn't encounter that many people. But it's also sufficiently traveled in that you can only camp in designated tenting areas—that have no facilities, so to me that only feels semi-wild as a result. Um ah And it's interesting—that trip was actually a first rip towards the end of a recovery from an injury and so my relationship to my body on that trip was actually tenuous and a little bit troubled and so there were ways in which I physically wasn't capable in ways that I was used to. But there were also ways in which I was having to re-establish a relationship and trust in my body's ability to do stuff that it used to be able to do and hadn't been able to do for a period of time. So the overall quality of that trip was—cautious and didn't feel. I felt more sort of like on the edge of my capacity and therefore the connections—felt more threatening than you know, like enriching.

I: Yeah.

R: Um and

I: Go ahead

R: And if I can counter that with a different example.

I: Yeah—sure

R: Um. Much older example, but I was—I did a semester long NOLS program in Kenya back in the 80's and that involved a lot of very wild wilderness experiences you know hiking in the Maasai Mara and waking up to the sounds of lions outside your tent or wildebeest moving

through the bushes ahead of you. So it was very one with the animals. And I remember I was hiking with a group of people, a small group of people—probably I don't know I think there might have been 10 of us. And we had been hiking for probably a week—yeah about a week at that point. And we came across this stream and there's was a place it was clear the animals had been down in the water. 'Cause you know it was easy convenient access and you know there were hoof prints and paw prints and all those good things. And um when we got there—we were hot and tired and dirty and we hadn't seen water like this in a while. And so we all just stripped off our clothes and you know threw down our packs and stripped off our clothes and . . . and frolicked in the water. And we felt—to me it was like such a perfect embodiedness of um—we were so animal in our bodies at that point. They were our tools, they were our engines, they were the things that were sustaining us, they were us. And we were a community of that together. And ah. In a way that felt like wow—I'm not gonna get to glimpse this kind of connection to myself and connection to others and connection to a landscape simultaneously. Yeah—so that's another, a better—a happier example I should say.

I: Yeah—what do you think it is about non-wild places—I guess urban areas that prevent us from having experiences such as the one you just described?

R: Um

I: So—I guess what is it about wilderness that allows that, but then also what is it you know about non-wilderness that prevents that...you know?

R: Yeah. My first answer is it's a matter of who's in charge. So in the wilderness—nature is in charge and we get to be in that space and figure out how to survive in that space. Humans aren't prioritized over everything else that's in that space. And the urban environment feels like humans—humans are in charge. Humans try and prioritize themselves over any needs of migrating birds or plants or a tree that wants to grow in this inconvenient place. About the only thing...like we don't get that many places where Mother Nature sort of slaps around and says get real about your priorities. I mean here in ***** we get earthquakes which I think is a fabulous reminder about who's in charge. And I used to live in ***** and you have weather there unlike ***** there's actually weather and has some say in what's going on. But I think it's just—I don't know. So I'm sitting outside in a very urban environment right now and I'm like what is it about this that feels like it doesn't let me connect in that same way. Well I can't go running around the street naked . . . so. . .

I: Right

R: So-to break those social constructs—so that's—there are rules for us humans to live in such close proximity. There's certain behavioral rules that um sort of are about what humans need—not what's natural for humans. I think there's a lot of that kind of thing going on. Like compromises we've made to be living in such density—that are not aligned with our true natures or don't allow expression of certain parts of our true natures that are much more physical I'd say.

I: Cool. Do you feel as though—well I guess first I'd like to ask you if you were to think about what it feels like to be physically immersed in wilderness or wildness....how would you describe that? What resonates with you when you think of physical immersion and wildness?

R: Um—uh—the light, wonder, awe, uh curiosity, um magic.

I: Can you tell me a little bit about magic? How would you describe that feeling or that experience?

R: The feeling of magic? (Chuckles)

I: Yeah.

(Pause)

I: Granted it's a hard one to describe.

R: Yeah it is—and I keep thinking of there's an Annie Dillard short story that I don't remember the title of it. But it's all about this interaction—this eye contact she had with ah I think it was a squirrel or something about that size and level of threat. But um so the magic is about like—the magic is about those moments of connection and whether it's across species or you know between me and a squirrel, between me and a tree. I don't know—it's very artistic in some ways. It's an opening to sort of synchronicity and possibility. Ah that is not intellectual experience.

I: Hmm—hmm. Cool. Do you feel like wilderness or wilderness experiences are raw, wild, or untamed? How do you feel about those descriptions?

R: Uhh (chuckles). So those feel to me like a very masculine approach to a wilderness.

I: Okay.

R: And I mean in that in the archetypal sense—not that physically men would say that. But it's ah—it's a—it's almost feels like an adversarial relationship to wilderness. Yeah—it doesn't really. Those would not be words I would use for my experience.

I: Cool. Yeah. It's interesting that you also said that. I interviewed someone yesterday and they were the first person to say or bring up the nature of—the gendered nature of those particular terms—of that language. And for some reason—yeah—I didn't even think of that. Anyways, it's just interesting that you also said it too, cause—yeah. Cause those are my—I think they came out of my head or descriptions—so anyway.

R: So I think those words in addition to the gendered piece sort of create a feeling in me of isolation, you know. When I think of nature as raw or wild—I think of me all by myself against nature and I guess for me a lot of my experience in nature has been breaking that sense of isolation and replacing it with one of connection—which could also be gendered in a way.

I: Yeah, true.

I: I think you—the story you mentioned in Kenya reminds me of a question I was gonna ask you about particular experiences where you felt connected to your body in primal, animal ways—perhaps maybe ways you felt connected to your own wildness. Can you think of other experiences that you've had that might fall into that category?

R: So where I felt most primal?

I: Or connected to your body in primal um animal ways...in wilderness?

R: Uhh in primal animal ways. Huh.

I: And if not-no worries.

R: No, no. I just mean...I'm kinda thinking there are differences of like that experience in Kenya was obviously a big version of that. But I think there is small versions of that in moments like I'm a big cross country skier and there are times when I'm you know like coasting down through some unbroken snow on a gentle decline and I'm just like—it feels like every fiber of my body is like in sync and I'm um it's almost like dancing—some sort of dance. And that—that feels very primal to me because again it's like I'm not thinking, I'm acting. And I'm trusting my body's ability to act and that feels primal in a very sort of like sweet way.

I: Yeah.

R: Ahh see. I'm trying to think of other primal. Oh I think—I think there are also primal fears that get evoked.

I: uh-huh

R: In wilderness settings. I've done a lot of top roping, rock climbing, top roping and um I can only imagine it would be worse I were you know like free climbing or lead climbing or any of those things, but it's you know there—those moments when you're stuck on the rock face and you're inability to move has nothing to literally there being or not being options on where to move your hands or feet. But it's more about—oh my god—every instinct in me says I'm gonna die if I let go of my left hand you know that I'm gonna fall and so—so part of the sort of excitement experiences is those places where you get to confront fears that aren't coming from any kind of rational conscious place. Um and ideally sort of get to cope with those without actually hurting yourself in the process.

I: Yeah. Um . . . I'm not a rock climber. What did you say at the very beginning of that...lead climbing?

R: Oh yeah—so different types of rock climbing. So—uh top roping is when there is a rope going to the ground up to an anchor back down to the climber. Lead climbing is a little more risky 'cause the person who's trailing the rope behind them and affixing to the face as they go along. So when they fall they tend to fall a little farther than a top roping situation. And free climbing is no rope at all.

I: Yeah (chuckles). Yeah I read some interesting stuff about free climbing, but....

R: Yeah—some of that...hmm. That wouldn't be a thing that I would choose to do, but I'm sure there's a navigation for people who do do that. Because there is a necessity to rely on your primal abilities, but also manage them at the same time.

I: Yeah

R: And that could be an interesting journey.

I: Um. Let's see. I guess my next question for you is if you feel as though wilderness is part of your identity and if so—maybe you can explain how and why? Or if not . . . ?

R: Wilderness as opposed to just physicality . . . actually wilderness?

I: Yeah. I guess wilderness experiences might be more, um, a better way to ask that question. I'm not sure how—yeah however you wanna answer that question is fine.

R: Um. Uh. It—uh. How is it part of my—well it definitely is part of my identity. I mean I can even quite—I'm trying to imagine a world where I don't have any of that or never had any of that and I'm like I don't even—I can't even fathom what that would be so it must be integral to who I am. I mean—for like when people ask me about you know spirituality or you know. My answer is always nature is that for me—being in that—in nature—is and the wilder the more natural that nature is, the better. It's that kind of sort of transcendence experience. So, is it part of my identity—um. I guess I would say yes.

I: Yeah

R: Certainly part of my wholeness.

I: Yeah. Yeah identity is kind of an abstract thing to think about, too. And you—I don't know....

R: But you—in your . . . you know the description of your project there are identity issues you know you have to be defining yourself. So there are issues of identity are already up—so if I sit around and I say I define myself as female and queer and you know white and there are a bunch of identities that I freely go to. But do I add to that list a person that goes into the wilderness as an essential part of my nature? And I guess I would say ye—it's not an identity term I've heard bandied about at any diversity trainings or anything (both chuckle)—but yeah it is essential though. I would not be me without that—those experiences.

I: Along the same lines as identity. We're kinda gonna change directions a little bit here, but we can make connections. Um. Could you describe your gender identity to me?

R: Yeah. Um. Ahh. So queer doesn't count as gender identity—that's more sexual orientation identity. I don't know. Um. Uh female bodied, but I think I—ahh definitely um feel some fluidity around my gender identity so I would say I probably present as like a butch lesbian, but that feels like an insufficient definition. And I don't have the right—I don't have words yet exactly, but there is some fluidity where I feel like I have both qualities of male and female gender. But I just don't know exactly how to define that yet.

I: Yeah. Um. In terms of how you feel as though you feel like you express that gender on an outward basis—how would you describe that? Or is there anything that comes to mind about gender expression for you?

R: Um. Ah. Ah. Well let's see—there's clothing—so I tend to dress um—what do I tend to dress like? Sporty (giggle), ready for that wilderness experience at any time. (I: chuckle). Uh. I often take note of the fact that like the only female clothing that I'm wearing is my underwear and everything else is actually men's clothing. But it's usually because it fits me better. But there's also like a lot of socialization attached to particular pieces of clothing. So I probably opt to err to stuff that's like uh...yeah.

I: It's also interesting that it's private, too—the only female piece. But anyway—go ahead.

R: Yeah (chuckles). That's hidden—no one knows for sure (jokingly). Uhh—yeah cause there probably men who wear all men's clothing, but then wear female underwear.

I: Yeah! Totally.

R: Um—I wear my hair pretty short. Um. Ahh. Um—I don't know.

I: Yeah

R: Because it's—can I just say one other thing?

I: Yeah! Yeah...say everything yeah.

R: It's funny that you ask the question right now because this week I've been experimenting with wearing different—my ears are pierced and I was wearing different earrings. And I bought this particular pair. I had just some—yeah captive beads, silver, ah loop kinda things—which are I think are fairly un-gendered or err toward—yeah there definitely not feminine. And I bought these other earrings and put them in that were longer and luuvd and so they were sort of more feminine in appearance and it's so fascinating for asking people what they think of them. And you know some people are like, oh that looks great—it makes you look so much softer. And then other people are like, that's completely incongruous—you're butch—what's up with that—I don't know—it confuses me. So . . .

I: Yeah

R: So—but I like to (something can't make out—'use' or 'amuse') people sometimes

I: Yeah well how did you feel about people's reactions to...?

R: I was curious about it. Um. I felt like I was getting insight into how people more into them and their perceptions of me than any true thing about me. It also gave me some tools—so okay if I wanna look softer maybe this will get read this way. Why would I wanna look softer? Is that a kinda softness, the kinda softness that I feel like is a quality of mine or is that a softest—a different softness that actually I don't wanna be associated with. Ah. But I think mostly I just—I wanna feel like I have the flexibility to make those choices. Um. So-I feel like it created a little more space for me to experiment.

I: Yeah. Um. So thinking about that discussion you know we just had about gender identity and gender expression and maybe thinking about those things in—in a different setting—such as wilderness. How do you feel about um your body and gender in wilderness? So, for example, do you feel as though your body is gendered wilderness...or...do you think about it differently?

R: Ah. Um. You know I thought you were gonna ask about what you thought I thought about frilly girls clothing.

I: No.

R: in the equipment world. Uh. I think that I feel like. Do I feel gendered wilderness? I feel like my body fits really well in wilderness. It works really well. It can do the things I want it to do in that space. And it feels like a place where I can be both strong and reflective at the same time—which are qualities that I would sort of—you know probably my socialization would say those are masculine and feminine. Um—gendered traits, but it feels like in wilderness—I—my experience will be richest when I have both of those. Ah. So I hadn't really, hadn't really—you know there is less external trappings of gender identity when you're in the wilderness because everybody's wearing polypro you know.

I: Yeah

R: It kind of—the socialized cues that we give or try and use to sort of project our gender identity—that language gets taken away somewhat in the wilderness. And so it feels like the expression of gender becomes truer and unique to the individual, and less . . . like. Like I feel like I get to be in my body as it exist—um, which is different from how the other person who is naked running through the stream besides me is—you know what their body looks like and how they exist. But it feels like there is so much room for both of us to be whatever we exactly are at that moment.

I: Yeah. What do you think it is about wilderness that allows that or um . . . yeah—I don't know if allows is the right word. Support maybe is another word?

R: Yeah. Ah. I think that part of it is about the priorities. So—you know if you're out there—your first priority is surviving and um and then whatever it is you know if your hiking or whatever it is you're trying to do. You know having the physical capacity to do that: to take care of yourself in that environment. To keep yourself safe and you know healthy through that experience. And so it's not—you know it's. The things in an urban environment that are prioritized are like do I look good, am I gonna be read by others in a particular way. So, it feels like in wilderness there's a—ah—the standards are different.

I: Yeah

R: And the consequences are real. So . . . and I think nature is modeling around you that a lot of that stuff doesn't matter.

I: Yeah. Can you think of any other place where those—all of that that you just mentioned can happen for a person?

R: Um. I mean I feel like I've had—I've been in situations where I've had that experience. Ah. Um I trying to think of how—I don't know. Like I don't know how generalizable they are. You know, for example, I was on a 5 day queer Tantra workshop.

I: Hmm-um

R: And it was a residential one so I was living with a community of people and it was a very conscious experience. And it felt like in that place there was like all—all bodies and all genders were—were alive and welcome. So, I don't know. So—yes I feel like I've had non-wilderness versions of that. But they're very unique.

I: Yeah. Actually, I haven't asked that question. I just thought like I should ask that to see what else is there out there.

I: Um. Cool. Let's see. Well I got some more—kind of on a different topic—so it's a little bit of a change here. But um—can you think of any instances where you've chosen not to comply with or you've actively gone against—um the dominant rules or views of this society—this society being American, United States, um, yeah?

R: (laughing) That's a broad question.

I: Yeah—so whatever comes to mind first for you is fine, you know.

R: Uhh. Um. (Laughing). I mean any number of things. So I think being queer is going against the dominant paradigm. I think my particular sort of gender expression probably goes against the dominant paradigm. Um I don't have television. That goes against the dominant paradigm. Ahhh. I don't know. I mean—yeah I don't even know where to stop (laughing)...

I: Yeah...so. Would you say that those things are pretty integral or important to your identity as a whole? I guess what I'm thinking—I think of it as resistance—when you don't comply with or you actively go against—and not everyone—that term doesn't seem to resonate with everyone. So, but I guess if there is another term that you would use for that...or does resistance resonate with you, or?

R: Yeah. Yeah. That would work for me. I mean—yeah. Um. Those places where ah resistance works in the sense that's it's those places where I'm willing to stick out for *my values* even in the face overwhelming opposition to them.

I: Yeah

R: And of course because we're talking about wilderness that makes me wanna think about how is my wilderness experience inform my ability to resist.

I: Yeah—you wanna tell me about that...if you have any thoughts on it?

R: Um. Yeah. I do. I think it has ah the ability to sort of persevere in discomfort is certainly something I've learned being in the wilderness. You know there—you know when you're hiking on a miserable day and you're cold and wet and it promises to be cold and wet for a very long time and your hungry and all those things and you still keep going. Um—and then maybe you get rewarded with like a rainbow or something. I don't know there are ways in which it's made me be much more supported by—maybe it's my natural tendency, but it's certainly has confirmed that like sometimes things are challenging and hard and it's still worth doing them. And in fact—um if you try to use the measure of ease as an indicator of which direction you should be heading—that often will lead you astray. Um—cause yeah.

I: Yeah

R: This may not count as a wilderness experience, but it fits in my category of related wilderness things. I use to do a lot of ropes courses...you know what those are, yeah?

I: Hmm—um

R: And I remember one time when I was actually on the course and I was up on the high log you know 40 feet in the air and I was like terrified, my legs are shaking, and I'm like you know I can do this on the ground...why can't I do it up here. So it was like I need to be chill and be relaxed and you know like totally cool before I can move. And then I was like oh my god—no actually I just need to be able to take one step forward and it's gonna be ugly and I'm not gonna look pretty and I'm still gonna be shaky, but I am going to be moving and I will be aware that I'm moving and that's all that I need to be able to do. And as I was having that experience it totally—um resonated for me about—because at that point in my life I was trying to come out to my parents or something—they were like the last people I needed to come out to and so I was like struggling with that issue and terrified about doing that. And you know would they accept me or oust me from the family, what would happen. And I was like oh I get it—it's not that I have to wait until I feel like it's all—like I'm totally at ease and they're gonna be cool about it, everything will be fine and then I can do it. It's like I get to be terrified and awkward and ungainly and still can do this.

I: And do it anyway.

R: Yeah—exactly, so—embodied experiences of sort of like this psychic needs of reality. I think that's—I draw lots of metaphors from my wilderness experience that I bring into daily life.

I: Cool. Um. This is kind of on a similar theme. Do you feel that wilderness teaches you anything about your body in particular? And this has kind of been a theme throughout our conversation, but if this brings up anything new for you, yeah?

R: Well it requires you to become aware of your body first of all. And not only . . . you know you need to know when you're hungry. You need to know when you're getting a blister. You need to know when your toes—you can't feel your toes and you better stop and do something about that or you're gonna have frost bite. You need to tune into what your body is experiencing or you won't be safe in that environment. It also I think rewards you with sort of the richness

of—of experiencing and that sort of goes back to what I was saying about skiing. You know just like oh my gosh when do I feel so whole as I maneuver through the world. And this is—this is great and I can only do this while I'm out in this environment where I can you know feel the sun, smell the air, and you know feel the cold on my face and the difference on the sunny side from the shady side. I don't know—it just gives you all these places to be like, can you feel this? Can you feel that?

I: Yeah

R: So it's like a practice of meditation on awareness of body. (Pause) And it's . . . this is a completely trivial example. But it's also creative. And so like I'm thinking I'm sitting in a chair and I know what a chair feels like and what size and shape it should typically be and all that good stuff. And then I'm comparing it to winter camping where you like build a whole kitchen and you get to carve out your . . . like what actually shape do I want my seat to be cause I have this whole space available to make into anything I want. It's like, oh—it's actually quite cozy to have it be this way instead of what I thought it should be. So—yeah. It also allows you to break out of the sort of normalized ways we connect to our body and have a wider range of options to experiment with.

(Pause)

I: Cool. I'm writing things down so that's why it takes me a

R: Okay.

I: little while after each time you say something.

R: That's cool.

I: Um. Cool. I think I have just demographic questions—left for you.

R: Okay.

I: And then after that we can open it up a little bit. And before I ask of these—I wanna let you know that you can explore or expand on any of them or you cannot answer any of them if you don't want to.

R: Okay

I: So—about how often do you think you visit wilderness—just in a general sense?

R: Uh (chuckle). I'm trying to define in my own head what wilderness is.

I: Yeah

R: For that—so. Um. In my current context—in my current . . . I'm gonna use a definition that gives me.....probably once or twice a week.

I: K.

R: But if I were stricter in my definition—it would be like once or twice a year.

I: Yeah—yeah and you know that question is really—it's problematic. Every time I ask it—you know people bring that up and it's like maybe I just—this is not really that relevant. But um . . . what type of activities do you do there, you mentioned climbing, um cross country, um is there any other things that you like to do, backpack I think you said, too?

R: Backpacking. Currently what else—I don't know if I can get credit for anything else at the moment.

I: Yeah. And do you tend to go alone or in groups or both or?

R: Um—so my urban wilderness experiences I tend to go alone. My like real once or twice a year wilderness experiences—um go with others.

I: Okay. Are they generally co-ed, same-sex?

R: Probably generally same-sex.

I: Okay.

I: And could you describe your sex identification for me?

R: My sex identification—as in... (Laughing)

I: Yeah...I just added that 'identification' (R: laughing) on the fly just—your sex, yeah?

R: So like as in male, female, trannies—all those categories...or?

I: Yeah.

R: Okay. Female.

I: And your sexual orientation?

R: Queer

I: And could you describe your race or ethnicity for me?

R: WASP

I: WASP

I: And your age is the last one?

R: 52

I: 52

I: Okay. Um. Well that's all the questions I have, but I generally you know open it up at the end just in case you know there's anything that you wanted to say or share that you didn't get a chance to. Um—I'm certainly open to any of that.

R: Um. (Pause) Ah. I'm thinking.

I: Sure.

R: No. I don't. Ah. I do feel like there are people in the urban world trying to create the wilderness experience in the urban place. So they're doing movement, sort of embody, embodiment movement classes and stuff. So—I appreciate that there are people that are trying to like figure out how to bring some of that out of the wilderness into the urban environment. 'Cause not everybody by any stretch is gonna get to go out into the wilderness.

I: Hmmum

R: And it seems so critical for us not to lose that connection to our bodies and to as an extension to nature. Um for so many reasons. So that's the only additional thing I would say. Uh. And then I'm just really curious about like your project and what you're finding and (giggle).

I: Sure. Um. Well first I wanted respond to what you just mentioned. Have you ever—you were talking about embodied movement classes. Have you ever taken or heard of contact improvisation?

R: Yeah. Yeah.

I: That's one of the things—well it really resonates with me. But when you mentioned some things way back in the interview—you tied some things into dance—particular feelings of—yeah—that's what I thought of immediately. Yeah—I just really agree and think that's awesome. Um. In terms my project—what am I finding? I'm finding all kinds of great things—although—let's see you're 11th person I've interviewed. So-and I've only got about half transcribed 'cause I've been real busy. But—um—I'm finding—I don't know—do you have anything in particular that you wanna ask me?

R: Well did you have a thesis that you're trying to prove or disprove?

I: Um—okay. No—not really. It's more of an exploration than you know disproving or proving a hypothesis. I did—you know—I have some general like guiding research questions and did a pretty heavy theoretical investigation before I started on you know theories of gender and the body and you some wilderness literature and um. And I chose to interview queer people because I thought that they had a unique perspective on gender a lot of times...and resistance and—yeah I've just really become interested in how people negotiate identity and gender—in wilderness particularly. And also trying to like—it's a really—I guess an in-depth exploration of what the term embodiment means. Embodiment and gender—just kind of a term that's thrown around—but just really trying to flesh out everything that that means for people. So that's been really—pretty amazing, but...um.

R: It sounds fascinating and

I: Yeah—it is.

R: And I appreciate the fact that you're doing the exploration.

I: Yeah

R: And uh—will it be possible for your subjects to see your final analysis?

I: Yeah. Certainly. Um. I'll be—I'm gonna try and defend by the spring. I don't know if that will happen or not...maybe June. But—in any case—definitely there will be a final thesis written, um, and those are all printed and available in our university library. But if anybody is interested in that—then I can definitely—you know I'll probably send out an email to everybody that participated and where you can access the final document. Also if you're interested you know my interpretations of your our interview—you can always let me know that and I can check back with you in a couple months with that—um analysis—and confirm with you if you want. I always offer that to anyone who wants that, too.

R: Okay. Yeah. Well—all that's interesting.

I: Okay

R: I mean 'cause I think these are topics that I'm always thinking about, too. About you know gender. And I hadn't made the connection between gender and wilderness and embodiment—so I'm very curious about that. But each one of those pieces is something that I've given a lot of thought to.

I: Yeah, me too.

R: So—good luck to you.

I: Well thanks. I appreciate you participating. And I will—yeah—I'm sure I'll talk to you sometime soon.

R: Okay. Great

I: Cool

R: Thanks

I: Thanks. Bye

R: Bye bye.

End of recording.

July 15th, 2010
Hello Everyone!

The end is finally near! I'm wrapping things up with the final draft of the thesis and wanted to thank everyone for participating in this project. It has been a long but exciting journey. I wanted to also send everyone a draft of my Results Chapter for the thesis. When reading the results, please consider a couple things. First, the Results Chapter is one of five chapters in the thesis. They follow an Introduction (explaining why I have chosen to study gender, body, and wilderness); a Literature Review (an overview of relevant theoretical and empirical work); and a Methodology Chapter (explaining how I collected and analyzed the data and why I chose the methods that I did). Following the Results chapter, there is a Discussion Chapter where I make substantive recommendations for future research based on the Results from the study. A final, bound copy of my thesis should be available at the University of Montana library in six months to a year. Second, I want to point out that I've used interview data in this chapter to illustrate what I thought represented the overarching themes. As a result, not all interview data was presented and some interviewee quotes were used more regularly than others. Please do not take this as an indication that any stories left out are somehow less worthy. Indeed, the Results chapter doesn't fully represent *all* of the data collected from the interviews. Unfortunately the scope of the project did not allow me to develop all of the themes that surfaced from these rich stories. Still, I think the underlying message drawn from your stories and presented in this thesis is profoundly compelling, novel, and inspiring.

I encourage everyone to give this chapter a read and let me know how you feel. I'll be defending my thesis in early August and will be submitting the final written thesis to the University of Montana in late August (as a bound publication in the UM library). Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions, concerns, or remarks that you may have.

Thanks again for helping me with this research project. It has been an awesome experience and I'm grateful for the all the stories you've shared with me. Take care, and perhaps we'll meet again sometime.

Sincerely,
Angela Meyer

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